

Refugee Family Reunification, Mental Health, and Resettlement Outcomes in Aotearoa New Zealand



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Family Refunification, Mental Health and Resettlement Outcomes in Refugees in Aotearoa New Zealand

Executive Summary

Family reunification is widely recognised as a vital issue for people from refugee backgrounds but relatively little research has been reported on its relation to mental health or resettlement outcomes. A study was carried out over the course of 2011 involving an initial international review of the literature. A total of 46 respondents from diverse refugee backgrounds with direct experience of the family reunification process in New Zealand were recruited from multiple national and ethnic community backgrounds in Auckland, Wellington, and Hamilton. and invited to discuss and share their experiences. Structured individual interviews were carried out with 15 individual participants, as well as 13 focus groups, in addition to analysis reviews of case histories. Research questions focused on the meaning of 'family', the expectations and experiences the family reunification experience in New Zealand; and on the perceived impacts of reunification, or lack of it, on the resettlement process and health and wellbeing. The data obtained were analysed applying qualitative thematic induction methods. Findings were consistent with the limited earlier literature in relation to the impacts of family reunification issues. Respondents also reported on their experiences when family reunification was successful and when it was not, and on their experiences as consumers or applicants engaged with the immigration system. Potential practical applications as well as limitations of the present study are discussed, as well as recommendations for further research. Some practical specific recommendations flowing from direct consumer feedback of former refugees involved with family reunification applications are presented for informing policy and for consideration by decision-makers.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research is to investigate the ways in which the family reunification process in New Zealand affects resettled refugees in relation to mental health and settlement outcomes

A refugee is defined as a person who is outside of their country of origin and is unable to return due to a well-founded fear of persecution (United Nations Convention, 1951).

1.1 Overview

There are presently estimated over 35 million refugees worldwide and approximately 40 thousand former refugees resettled in New Zealand (United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) New Zealand Department of Labour (DOL) 2007). New Zealand is internationally recognised by the UNHCR and the international community as a significant refugee resettlement country. The New Zealand refugee quota is presently set by the New Zealand Government at up to 750 new arrivals each year. The composition of the quota is annually signed off by the Minister of Immigration and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Additionally, there is provision for up to 300 relatives of refugees already living in New Zealand to be admitted under the Refugee Family Support Category.

In 2008, at a national forum of refugee agencies organised by UNHCR in Auckland, participants identified issues associated with family reunification as being of paramount importance to successful refugee resettlement globally. The RASNZ Research Unit was requested by former refugee groups to undertake a structured scientific study of the effects of the family reunification process on applicants and their families. In 2009 family reunification research was determined to be a strategic priority by the RASNZ Board and funding was sought and obtained.

Separation from family members is a relatively frequent occurrence with refugee families and family separation is reported by many resettled refugees as being one of their greatest stressors. Family members who have made it to a safe country often experience a sense of guilt, as well as feelings of fear and responsibility for their loved ones (New Zealand Immigration Service, 2004; Poole & Swan, 2010). Members of separated families frequently experience long-term stress and feelings of guilt, powerlessness and depression as a result of not knowing what has happened to their loved ones (Rousseau, Mekki-Berrada, & Moreau, 2001). In addition, family members left behind often report feelings of abandonment and loss (Rousseau et al., 2004).

Although migrant families are often separated by the process of migration, the separation experiences of migrant families are qualitatively different to the separation experiences of refugee families (Suarez-Orozco, Todorova & Louie, 2002). Unlike voluntary migrants, refugees have no choice about leaving their home country, or about where they resettle. The stresses and challenges associated with forced migration and involuntary separation from loved ones are, therefore, substantively different to the stresses and challenges faced by families that have voluntarily chosen to migrate to another country.

The unfolding process of family reunification following involuntary separation is likely to be complex. A number of clinical studies have found that following family reunification, significant negative ramifications occurred. Instead of the positive outcomes reunified families had initially hoped for or expected, stresses and sometimes serious complications and difficulties were encountered (Burke, 1980; Hamilton-Collins & Fein, 1985). For example, families in which member(s) were left behind in war zones, camps or unsafe environments often experienced adjustment and attachment difficulties when reunited. These difficulties were frequently associated with feelings of guilt and abandonment on the part of different family members (Glasgow & Ghouse-Shees, 1995). As a consequence, the physical and mental health and wellbeing of family members may have been compromised and the family's overall ability to successfully resettle have been impaired.

Further complications can arise when functional family systems evolve and adapt during resettlement in a host country in the absence of a separated family member. Resettled families and previously separated family members sometimes experience significant adaptation and adjustment difficulties at the point of reunification. Children who were left behind but subsequently reunited with their parents may be ambivalent towards the reunification process and express feelings of loss as a result of separation from surrogate care givers with whom they had developed significant attachments during the period of separation from their families (Arnold, 1991). As a result, parents sometimes struggle to reassert control or establish behavioural boundaries with their children. They may also experience guilt associated with the separation, and excessively overindulge their children (Arnold, 1991).

A further factor associated with family reunification is the disproportionate amount of time and emotional energy that is often expended, by refugee families, in trying to get those who were left behind, safely to the country of refuge (New Zealand Immigration Service, 2004). This is often to the detriment of the family's ability to resettle as those involved are so preoccupied with their efforts to be reunified with missing family, that it is difficult for them to effectively focus on and overcome the challenges of resettlement in a new country.

Refugees often see family reunification as the panacea that will end their journey and therefore their suffering (Rousseau et al., 2004). Family reunification is not, however, a simple or straightforward process. Complexities associated with the process may well result in reunified families experiencing significant adjustment and adaptation difficulties that require extensive and ongoing psycho-social support (Simpao, 1999). In addition, the stress of on-going separation can detrimentally impact on the physical and mental health and well-being of those involved, thus, impeding the process of resettlement (Marlowe, 2010).

1.2 Scope of the Present Study

The present study investigated the ways in which the family reunification process in New Zealand affects resettled refugees with particular regard to mental health and settlement outcomes. Respondents in the study were refugees whose application for family reunification had been successful; refugees whose application for family reunification had been unsuccessful and refugees who were awaiting the outcome of their application. The results of this study should

assist government and non-government agencies working in this area in the development and implementation of relevant policies, procedures and practices.

CHAPTER TWO

INTERNATIONAL LITERATURE REVIEW

Each year, up to 1,500 new refugees are resettled in New Zealand under the United Nations Convention 1951, and there are approximately 40,000 people in New Zealand with refugee backgrounds (New Zealand Immigration Service, 2004). The New Zealand refugee quota is based on 750 new arrivals each year, including 300 places for family reunification. Family reunification refers to the bringing together of family that have been separated for various reasons along their journey to resettlement. Separation is common, and reunification is often seen as an important step in the process of successful resettlement (Rousseau, Rufagarib, Bagilishyaa, & Meashama, 2004).

New Zealand is internationally recognised by UNHCR and the international community as a significant refugee resettlement country. The composition of the UN quota is annually signed off by the Minister of Immigration and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Although 300 places are set aside in policy for family reunification, for a range of reasons, a proportion of the designated quota vacancies are often left unfilled.

Family separation from extended and nuclear family members is a common phenomenon in refugee families. Although family separations also occur in migrant families, it has been identified that the circumstances and contexts of the separations can result in a variety of outcomes (Suarez-Orozco, Todorova & Louie, 2002). Certainly, under a forced migration context, the stresses and challenges faced by refugee families of leaving loved ones behind, with the desperate hope to one day be reunited, would be predicted to result in a set of different outcomes compared to an ordinary migrant family. During the resettlement process, families can undergo significant changes that are complicated by long periods of separation from their loved ones. If reunification does occur, often this process can take many years, and is often complicated by financial obstacles and immigration laws or policies (Simpao, 1999).

In 2009, Changemakers Refugee Forum Inc (2009) produced a discussion paper about the issues surrounding family reunification. The paper was produced in conjunction with three other agencies - Refugee Family Reunification Trust, Wellington Community Law Centre and Wellington Refugees as Survivors Trust. From a case review conducted with 32 families assisted by the Refugee Family Reunification Trust to reunite with their families left behind overseas, 93% were reported discharged from the Wellington Refugees as Survivors Trust service once they had been reunited with their families.

Mental Health & Settlement Outcomes

A number of clinical studies have also found that following family reunification, significant negative family ramifications have been reported. Instead of the positive results reunited families may have initially hoped for or expected, there are stresses and sometimes serious complications and difficulties encountered (Burke, 1980; Sewell-Corker, Hamilton-Collins & Fein, 1985). The family member(s) left behind in war zones, camps or unsafe environments may have experienced abandonment (Glasgow & Ghouse-Shees, 1995). Thus when reunited, attachment difficulties may occur, which may not only impact the individual's or the family's mental health, but also the family's ability to settle in New Zealand. Other complications can also occur in that during the separation period, the family in the host country may have adapted and developed in such a way that makes it difficult for members to reconnect with the functional family system. Children rejoining their parents may not always appreciate the sacrifice their parents have made in the host country and act ambivalently following the reunification (Arnold, 1991). Parents may also struggle to reassert control or implement boundaries and consequences with their children; or they may experience significant parental guilt and overindulge the children (Arnold, 1991). These complications can have a significant impact on the refugee families' mental health, affecting their settlement outcomes.

The trauma, grief and disruptions caused by separation, migration and reunification of families have profound negative psychological effects on children and their parents (Schen, 2005 and Smith, Lalonde and Johnson, 2004). It is reasonable to hypothesize that separation during migration will result in problems at school after reunification

Gindling and Poggio (2010) found evidence that family separation during migration has a negative impact on the educational success of immigrant children in U.S. schools. Children separated from parents during migration are more likely to be behind others their age in school and are more likely to drop out of high school. The negative impact of separation during migration on educational success is largest for Latin American immigrants, for children separated from their mothers (as opposed to fathers), for those whose parents have lived in the United States illegally, and for those who were separated from their parents at older ages and reunited with parents as teenagers.

Early studies on the effects of immigration in family relations showed that families tend to be affected by the experiences of immigration. Particularly, relationships between parents and children could become conflictive until the family dynamic is restored. Sluzki (1979) analyzed the effects of cultural, economic and emotional changes on immigrant families and showed how family roles and specific family dynamics are transformed with the immigration process. Relationships between parents and children in early childhood can affect a wide range of behaviours later in life. Attachment Theory, for example, argues that disruptions in “affection bonds” with parental figures (especially mothers) can have profound negative psychological and developmental implications later in life. Separation from parents is particularly important when the child is young (Winnicott, 1958; Ainsworth, 1989). Young children can interpret separation from parents as a complete loss of their love and protection. Attachment theory focuses on the effect of the bond that children develop in their relationship with parents and in the meaning of the interruption of the relationship reflected in the child's

behaviour. The loss of this bond with the parents triggers grief responses that affect behaviour. Separation from parents during migration, in particular, can lead to emotional distress and have an impact on later relationships and behaviour.

Refugees in general experience "ambiguous loss" in relation to friends and family members in the country of origin (Boss, 1991). Ambiguous loss is defined as the impossibility to mourn and heal after losing a loved one in the case of someone who is physically absent but psychologically present--friends and relatives who are alive but do not interact with the immigrant anymore. Refugee children have to deal with ambiguous loss after their mother or father leaves them, when they have to leave their caregiver in the country of origin, and when they leave the rest of their family and friends. This burden that refugee children bring to their new country and new school can become a significant constraint for them to succeed at school. The emotional impacts of separation and reunification are further complicated by pre and post arrival events and conditions that the child experiences in relation with his/her particular family situation.

Lahaie, et. al. (2008) found that the impact of family separation depends on whether the family member who migrates is the mother or father. A household where the caregiver-spouse (generally the mother) has migrated is 3.6 times as likely to include a child with educational or behavioral problems, while a household where a spouse who is not the caregiver (generally the father) migrates is less likely to include a child with educational or behavioural problems.

The emotional distresses that refugee children experience before their arrival to the host country will complicate their adjustment to family, school and culture in New Zealand. The literature on the adjustment of immigrant children to the host society suggests that such adjustment is a complex process that is likely to differ for immigrant children with different characteristics (Gindling & Poggio, 2010).

Haveman & Wolfe (1995) stated that stressful events during childhood (e.g. changes in geographic location) appear to have large and independent negative effects on a variety of indicators of children's (educational) attainments. A large body of research in the United States found that children who grow up with only one birth parent are disadvantaged across a range of outcomes. For example, they are less likely to complete high school and are more likely to have poor mental health in adulthood (Case, McLanahan & Lin, 2000). Based on a longitudinal survey of children of immigrants in California, Rumbaut (2005a) also found that school performance is strongly correlated with family dynamics and family cohesion.

Reunification with parents is followed by a short period of euphoria, which in turn is almost always followed by problems with family relationships and discipline (Gindling & Poggio, 2010). Often the mother or father has formed a new family in the host country, and it is not uncommon for the refugee child to enter a family with siblings who have been born in the host country. Parents report that new family members, husbands and siblings find it difficult to accept the refugee child who feels he/she is the stranger, and that it is difficult for the child to accept authority from mother and new relatives (Gindling & Poggio, 2010).

Gindling and Poggio (2010) have further identified that emotional and discipline problems of separation and reunification are most noticeable for children who arrive as teenagers. Mothers reported that children who reunited at younger ages are respectful of parental authority and responsive to strong positive parental expectations regarding school, while those who are reunited as teenagers were resentful, disrespectful and hard to control.

The earlier *Refugee Voices* research in New Zealand (DOL 2005), reported that family reunification is nearly a universal highest priority for most resettled former refugees and a recurring theme. Respondents have reported during the present study that they feel a huge sense of responsibility for family members still in the refugee camps or in the former country. Having family members already within the country of settlement has been identified as greatly assisting the resettlement process. Assisting refugee families to reunite can decrease adjustment costs for refugees and improve resettlement outcomes by decreasing the financial and emotional strain that occurs from being separated from family members.

2.1 Stressors Affecting Refugees

Refugees face a host of unique stressors along their migration path including pre-flight, flight, and resettlement stressors. During the pre-flight stage, refugees are subjected to social upheaval and increasing chaos in their daily lives. Social development and schooling is disrupted, and refugees frequently face threats to their safety (Lustig et al., 2004). In this pre-flight stage, refugees often witness or engage in violence, and live with fear and anxiety about the future (Papadopoulos, 2001). During flight from their homes, refugees face great uncertainty about the future and are at the mercy of external forces for their safety and wellbeing (Fazel & Stein, 2003). Upon arrival in their host country, refugees face a series of challenges to resettlement. These include adjustment to a new culture including language, people, religion and traditions; loss of control; separation from loved ones; loss of lifestyle and career; and loss of confidence and self-identity (Lustig et al., 2004; Schweitzer, Melville, Steel, & Lacherez, 2006).

There are many reasons for a refugee family to become separated during migration. For some, due to the costs and danger involved in escaping from their home country, one family member will leave first, acting as a scout. Once a safe path is established, the family must find the money to bring each of the other family members to the country of resettlement. Other refugee families may become separated during their flight path. This may be due to unforeseen situations such as an enemy attack which can result in people fleeing in different directions. For other families, separation can occur as a result of circumstance, where family members are in different locations when a crisis strikes and they are forced to flee. Families may also become separated due to organisational persecution where one family member is taken by government forces, and the rest of the family flees in order to avoid being harassed.

The issue of reunification has been repeatedly highlighted as a major concern for refugees and a major barrier to their mental well-being and resettlement (ChangeMakers, 2009). As such, there are provisions in place for the reunification of family members under the United Nations Convention on Refugees (Immigration New Zealand, 2010). It is believed that reuniting family members in a safe and secure environment will greatly improve the well-being of the refugees

and benefit society generally. It is thought that when family members are reunited, the stress and negative consequences associated with separation will decrease and the quality of life will increase. This includes the alleviation of a number of mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, and panic (Poole & Swan, 2010). This in turn will help speed the acculturation process and successful resettlement. Furthermore, improving the well-being of refugees decreases the societal costs at a number of levels. It can decrease the strain on health services utilised by the refugee families. Reunification also allows the refugee to re-focus the time and energy spent on having their family join them, to ventures associated with successful resettlement such as language acquisition, employment, and community involvement (Wilmsen, 2011).

2.2 Reunification Policies, Protocols and Practices in New Zealand

People who have been designated with refugee status by the UNHCR and are referred as priority cases through the Refugee Quota Branch (RQB) of the Department of Labour in New Zealand for possible inclusion in new intakes. Prior to accepting the refugee for resettlement into New Zealand, the RQB conducts an interview with the individual. During this interview, the refugee will be asked to declare any spouse or dependent children that they have. This information is crucial for future reunification,

In August 2010, Cabinet agreed to establish a three-year rolling Refugee Quota Programme (DOL, 2012).. New Zealand resettles 750 (plus or minus 10 percent) refugees each year under the Refugee Quota Programme (DOL, 2012). Of the 750 places up to 300 places are set aside for family-linked cases. The UNHCR assesses the priority and protection needs assessments for refugees and those assessed by the UNHCR as being most in need of protection are submitted to New Zealand for consideration for inclusion in the Refugee Quota Programme. As such, the places set aside for family-linked cases may not be filled by those types of cases depending on the protection needs and priority of the cases assessed and submitted by the UNHCR (DOL, 2012).

Family reunification within the Refugee Quota Programme is intended to;

- enable New Zealand to meet its international and humanitarian obligations,
- maintain the principle of family unity, and
- facilitate the successful resettlement of mandated refugees resident in New Zealand by providing them with an opportunity to sponsor immediate family members (DOL, 2012).

The objective of this subcategory is to facilitate the reunification of immediate family members (declared spouses, dependent children and parents - where the child is dependent) who have been separated due to circumstances beyond their control. During the offshore interview of the cases submitted to New Zealand by the UNHCR, information is obtained by Immigration New Zealand (INZ) about any family members (spouse and/or dependent children) who may have been separated due to flight or other circumstances. Once the refugees arrive in New Zealand they are interviewed by INZ at the national Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre (MRRC) to start the process of family reunification. Information about the family reunification policies are also provided during the offshore interviews as well as during the six-week orientation programme quota refugee intakes undertake at the MRRC.

Refugees in New Zealand can also apply for family reunification under other immigration policies such as the Refugee Family Support Category (RFSC), which enables 300 sponsored people to settle in New Zealand claims, under the Refugee Quota Programme for the 300 places designated in the annual quota. The Refugee Family Support Category policy came into effect on 12 November 2007 (INZ 2007). It replaced the Refugee Family Quota (RFQ) policy which operated on a randomised 'ballot' system. The current policy allows some former refugees without family members in New Zealand (subject to certain criteria) to apply to sponsor relatives to settle in New Zealand. Up to 300 places are available per annum.

For refugees who declared spouses or dependent children in their initial interviews, a family reunification request must be made in writing to the RQB when the refugee wishes to bring their family to New Zealand (Immigration New Zealand, 2010). Each of these cases is considered individually and every effort is made to reunite parents and their children. However, reunification is not guaranteed and no timeframe is offered for the request to be processed. Quota refugee's who did not declare their spouse or children, usually cannot sponsor them under the Refugee Quota Programme.

In 2009, a 41 page discussion and policy paper was produced by the Changemakers Refugee Forum, the Wellington Community Law Centre, the Family Reunification Trust and Wellington Refugees as Survivors Trust. This discussion document was submitted to the Government and circulated nationally. The paper concludes: *"Family reunification continues to be the major concern for former refugees living in New Zealand. Yet despite, over many years, numerous submissions and meetings identifying significant issues arising from policy and practice, no substantial reviews or changes have taken place"* (Changemakers, 2009, pp 6).

The abolition in 2001 of the Humanitarian Category for permanent residence remains controversial (Changemakers, 2009). This category enabled former refugees with family members who did not meet normal immigration policy, but who were in circumstances of extreme humanitarian concern, to apply for residence.

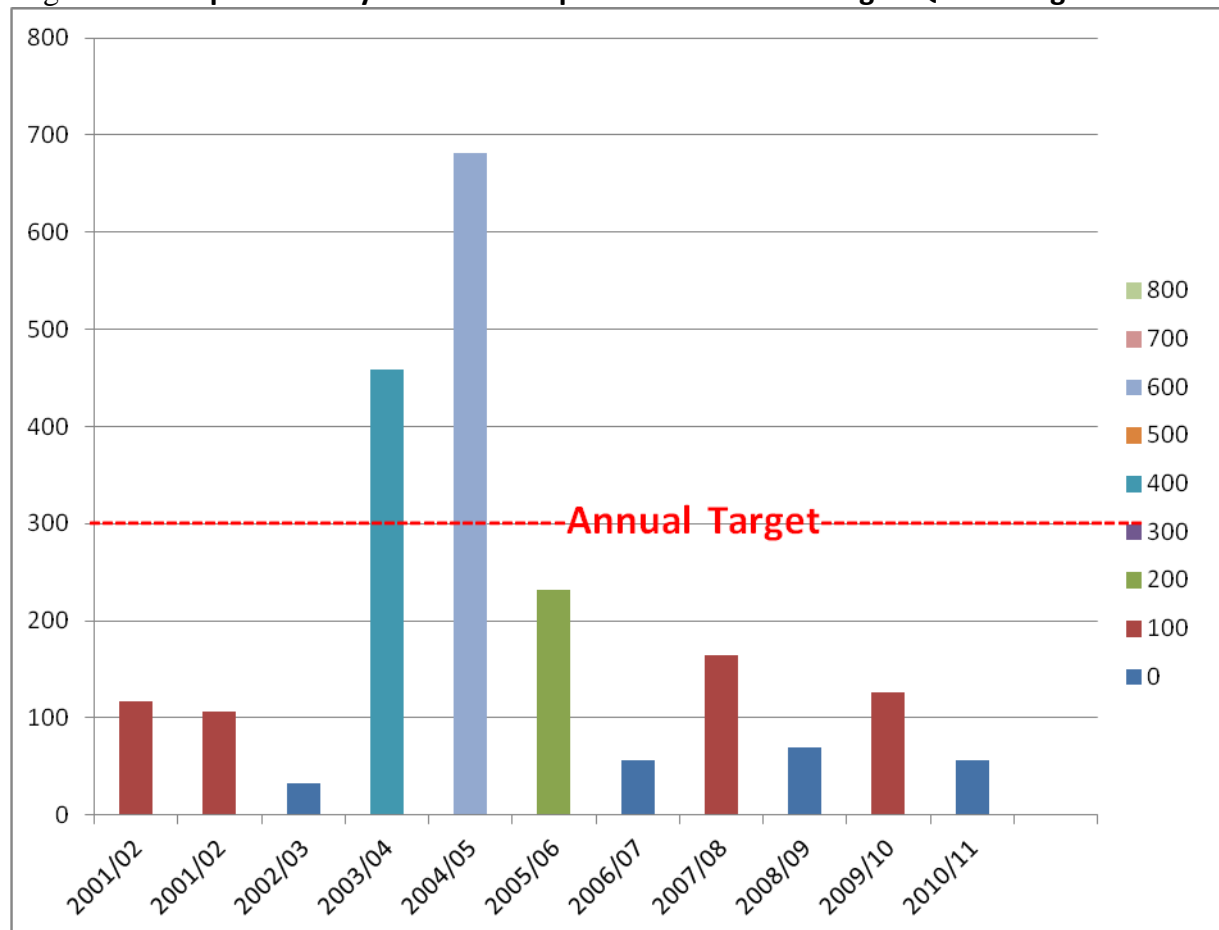
A serious issue for former refugee community groups (Changemakers, 2009) is the lack of fulfilment of the existing 300 annual places allocated for family reunification. The data from the Department of Labour (2012) is shown below in Figures 1 and in graph illustration in Figure 2 up to 2011. In almost all years, the result has fallen far short of the target. The variance was in 2003-05 as a result of exceptional circumstances surrounding the Tampa asylum boat incident when large intakes were processed related to that specific event as authorised by the Government of the day. The most recent number of 57 in 2011 was related to the Christchurch earthquake disaster which resulted in reduced numbers of the entire annual quota intake which because of national lack of housing and settlement capacity.

Figure 1 Family Reunification Component of Annual Refugee Quota Programme

Year	Number of family Reunification cases resettled	Comments
2000/01	117	
2001/02	107	
2002/03	32	
2003/04	459	Due to Tampa family reunification
2004/05	682	Due to Tampa family reunification and a special Africa project
2005/06	232	
2006/07	56	
2007/08	165	
2008/09	69	
2009/10	126	
2010/11	57	57 refugees were resettled in New Zealand because of the impact of the earthquakes in Christchurch

Source: NZ Department of Labour 2012

Figure 2: Graph of Family Reunion Component of Annual Refugee Quota Programme



Provisions of the Refugee Family Support Category

The RFSC assists refugees to settle in New Zealand by allowing them to sponsor family members for residence who do not qualify for residence in New Zealand under any other immigration category (DOL, 2012). Each year 300 sponsored people (including their partners and dependent children) are able to settle in New Zealand under this category.

The RFSC has a two-tier registration system. Priority is given to Tier One sponsors who meet the relevant sponsorship requirements, as it is considered that they have a more immediate need to bring family members to New Zealand.

Tier Two sponsors are those refugees who are living in New Zealand and who have no other family member eligible to be sponsored for residence under any other residence policy.

If not all places are taken up with Tier One registrations then Tier Two registrations will be called for. Tier One registrations are managed through a queue, and Tier Two is managed through a ballot process. An announcement on the management of Tier Two and the opening of registrations for this tier will be made in 2012.

In 2010/11 a total of 411 Invitations to Apply were issued, which provided applicants with 12 months to lodge a full application with the relevant offshore INZ branch. In 2010/11 189 applications were approved. As at 31 January 2012 there are eight Tier One registrations awaiting a decision (DOL, 2012).

Asylum Seekers

Asylum seekers enter New Zealand through either legal or illegal means, and lodge claims for refugee status under the UN Refugee Convention definition. From 2005/06 – 2010/11 the overall percentage for refugee status claims approved at first instance and at appeal is 41%. (DOL, 2012).

Asylum seekers who are approved refugee or protected person status may apply for a Residence Visa. Convention Refugees are people recognised as refugees by the New Zealand Government under the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (DOL 2012). Protected persons are people recognised as having protected persons status by the New Zealand Government under the 1966 International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights and the 1984 Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

Approved refugees and protected persons receive information about family reunification and other support they can access in New Zealand (see attachment below).

As only about 41% on average of the asylum approximately 300 asylum seekers annually lodging claims are granted approval of refugee status there are less convention than quota refugees in settlement, although the numbers seeking family reunification are significant. The number of asylum seekers has reduced considerably in recent years due to border control occurring off shore in Asia and Australia. Due to New Zealand's relative isolation, border

control can be implemented effectively, unlike many other countries which share common borders. Convention refugees have the same rights to apply for family reunification as the quota refugees and frequently do so.

2.3 Expectations of Family Reunion Upon Arrival

A study conducted by Immigration New Zealand (2004) indicated that 85% of refugee's in New Zealand had family members overseas. For the purposes of this study, family members were defined as siblings, parents, siblings-in-law, parents-in-law, children, children-in-law, or spouses. When asked which family members it was important for them to have in New Zealand, respondents responded with a wide range of people that greatly expanded on the above definition of family. For example, respondents mentioned grandparents and grandchildren, as well as extended clan, tribe and village associates. It is important to note that many of the extended family members mentioned by the respondents would not be eligible for residence under current immigration policy (New Zealand Immigration Service, 2004).

The same study found that six months after arrival 73% of respondents intended to sponsor their family members to join them in New Zealand (New Zealand Immigration Service, 2004). Sixty-one percent of refugees who had been in New Zealand for more than four years intended to sponsor their relatives. This indicates that refugees on arrival expect to be able to reunite with their extended family members in the future. It also indicates that recently arrived refugees are spending a lot of time and energy focusing on bringing their relatives to New Zealand rather than on the resettlement process, and that this time and energy does not dwindle over time.

After six months, only five percent of refugees who had applied for reunification had been successful. Approximately half of the refugees who had been in New Zealand for at least four years had been successful in their application to sponsor family members to come to New Zealand. These results highlight the lengthy period of time that the family reunification process can take.

Many refugees find the delays and the uncertainties of waiting to be reunited with family to be re-traumatising (ChangeMakers, 2009). Refugees have reported that they would rather be in the same country as their relatives without the safety or comforts, than separated from their family members (Weine et al., 2004).

Many refugees feel guilty that they are safe while their family members continue to live in hardship, and often experience depression, anxiety, and/or survivor guilt (ChangeMakers, 2009). This strength of emotion to be reunited with family members and the uncertainty around reunification, can lead to mental health crises and great problems with resettlement. In addition, the longer the separation between family members, the greater the risk of dysfunction and further mental health issues once the family is reunited (ChangeMakers, 2009).

Despite the push towards reunification both from the refugee community as well as governmental and international policies, research has indicated that not all reunited families have

positive outcomes. The length of the separation; the life stage at which the separation took place; the changes in role, both within the family and within the community; traumatic experiences endured; and the host community, all influence the process of reunification and its outcomes (Poole & Swan, 2010; Rousseau et al., 2004). Reunification can have substantial positive and negative influences on refugee mental health and resettlement including education, employment, financial success, and acculturation.

2.4 Impact of Delay on Reunification

Long delays in the reunification process are a global phenomenon, and it often takes many years for reunification requests to be processed (ChangeMakers, 2009; Rousseau et al., 2001; Rousseau et al., 2004; Wilmsen, 2011). These delays translate into an array of different experiences for both the family members trying to make a new life in the host country, as well as for family members left behind. Studies have shown the negative impact of long separation between family members.

Refugees who have reached a safe country often report feeling guilty about leaving their loved ones (Poole & Swan, 2010). This sense of guilt is often over-the-top, and the lack of control in being able to change the situation often leads to a sense of powerlessness and loss of hope (Rousseau et al., 2001). Some refugees have reported waiting for their family to be akin to the torture that they escaped from in their own country, and have said that they would prefer to be with their family in an unsafe country, rather than be apart from them (ChangeMakers, 2009; Rousseau et al., 2004). The on-going concern and sense of responsibility that these refugees feel for their family, influences their mental health. High rates of depression and anxiety have been reported in refugees who are separated from loved ones (Rousseau et al., 2004). The constant anxiety and fear for family members overseas makes it difficult for refugees to resettle into their host society.

Some refugees try to ease the guilt of separation by sending the majority of the money that they earn to family members overseas (Schen, 2005; Wilmsen, 2011). The difficulty with this is that resettlement can be an expensive process. Sending money overseas limits the funds available for the legal procedures involved in reunification attempts, further delaying the process. In addition, with few monetary resources left at their disposal, the resettled refugee is unable to partake efficiently in the host community, isolating them further and decreasing their support network in times of stress.

Family members who have arrived in a safe country often suffer a sense of powerlessness with regards to being able to help their family members still overseas (Poole & Swan, 2010). This can produce feelings of lethargy and hopelessness, culminating in an inability to do anything other than wait (Rousseau et al., 2001). This, in turn, can decrease the refugee's sense of personal identity which is often based on perceptions of family and place in society. Consequently, refugees often experience increased symptoms of depression and anxiety (Rousseau et al., 2001).

Improved global communications in recent years have often added to the negative impact of separation. Instant messaging has meant that news can be heard of distressing events, such as persecution, property seizure, detention or torture, in real time, increasing the fear and anxiety about family members while simultaneously highlighting the inability of the family in New Zealand to be able to help them (Poole & Swan, 2010). Furthermore, long distant communication can be expensive to maintain. Family members left behind often do not have regular access to the internet, and postal services in these countries are often disrupted. This means that communication may be limited to those times of crises, further increasing the resettled refugees' fear and anxieties (Rousseau et al., 2001).

The concept of ambiguous loss has been applied to separated refugee families (Luster, Qin, Bates, Johnson, & Rana, 2008; Steinglass, 2001). Ambiguous loss refers to the unclear loss of a loved one. The loved one may be physically present but psychologically absent such as in the case of an Alzheimer's patient; or they may be psychologically present but physically absent for example a soldier who is missing in action, and their fate is unknown (Boss, 1991). Research has indicated that those families who are in a state of ambiguous loss show far greater distress than families who experience a more defined, or definite, loss of a loved one (Boss, 1991). Ambiguous loss applies to refugees in that absent members cannot really be considered absent due to the perpetual uncertainty and permanent risk surrounding them (Steinglass, 2001). As such, the family is unable to grieve for their loved one and is, therefore, unable to create a new, coherent, family system without the missing member(s).

This constant state of limbo can heighten anxiety, increase depression, and exacerbate stress levels within the resettled family as they search for answers about missing family members. Long waiting times for the reunification process serves to prolong this sense of ambiguous loss and mourning. Following reunification, the absence may further linger, as the absence of family members was never fully acknowledged and therefore it is difficult to address the gaps that it caused in the joint family history (Rousseau et al., 2004).

Many studies have focused on the separation between parents and children along the migration path. Children are often left behind with extended family while their parent's make the migration to safer shores, with the intention of bringing the children to join them at a later date. The influence of this separation is different depending on cultural norms, the surrogate family's attitude to the child as well as to the biological parents, and the bonds forged between the parent and child prior to the separation.

The temporary loss of a parent due to migration can influence the developmental trajectory of a child (Mitrani, Santisteban, & Muir, 2004). Attachment theory suggests that the lack of a strong attachment to a nurturing figure in early childhood, will have a negative impact on the child's psychological well-being (Bowlby, 1969). Attachment theory posits that lack of a secure attachment in early life can lead to behavioural and emotional disturbances, and a decreased ability to regulate the self (Mitrani et al., 2004). In relation to refugees and the reunification of family members, the longer the delay in reunification, the greater the difficulty in establishing a secure attachment to parental figures.

Attachment theory has drawn some criticism in its application to refugees, as it is predominately from a Western perspective which has a strong emphasis on the nuclear family (Suárez-Orozco, Todorova, & Louie, 2002). As such, it does not pay due regard to cultural differences in attachment. Many of the cultures where refugees come from have a long established history of community surrogacy where extended members of the family, and/or community, help to raise the children (Beiser, 1988; Mitrani et al., 2004). Further studies have shown that the attachment does not need to be to a parent, but can be to anyone who cares for the child (Mitrani et al., 2004). What is important is the child's sense of security in the attachment. This then gives them a sense of security in the world, and in themselves. The process of separation can lead the child to feel abandoned and unable to form a strong attachment to anyone, leaving them feeling insecure and uneasy in the world and within themselves. A delay in reunification adds to the difficulty in establishing these attachments and bonds to family members and therefore increases the long term negative effects of separation.

Research has shown a differential effect on the child if separated from the mother or from the father. Children separated from both of their parents are more likely to report depressive symptoms, anxiety, PTSD intrusion, avoidance, and hyper-arousal symptoms than children who are not separated from their parents (Derluyn, Mels, & Broekaert, 2009; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2002). In general, refugee youth who are separated from their father (ie: live with their mother), experience more traumatic experiences (Derluyn et al., 2009). However, youth separated from their mother show more posttraumatic stress and avoidance symptoms, illustrating the important role of the mother in providing support for their children (Derluyn et al., 2009; Schen, 2005).

Children who are left behind often report feeling a sense of abandonment and anger towards their parents (Derluyn et al., 2009; Glasgow & Gouse-Sheese, 1995; Mitrani et al., 2004). This is mitigated by the attitude, care and emotional availability of the child's surrogate caregivers (Mitrani et al., 2004). Children who are cared for by people who make an effort to continue the connection between the biological parents and the children, often feel less angry and more loved by their parents even if the parents are absent for an extended period of time. In addition, caregivers who offer emotional support and are active in their care of the child, often instil the child with a sense of stability and love. This enables the child to form a strong sense of self and become secure in the world around them (Glasgow & Gouse-Sheese, 1995). This helps the child be more resilient to change and to form new connections upon reunification, decreasing the negative impact of separation and resettlement stress.

On the other-hand, surrogate caregivers may have a negative influence on the development of the child and their attachment to their biological parents (Glasgow & Gouse-Sheese, 1995; Mitrani et al., 2004). This may be intentional or unintentional on the part of the caregiver. There have been reports of caregivers directly undermining the authority of the parents by telling the children negative stories about their parents abandoning them (Mitrani et al., 2004). In other cases, the surrogate caregiver has been emotionally unavailable to the child increasing their sense of abandonment (Smith, Lalonde, & Johnson, 2004). This can be for a number of reasons but is most commonly due to the caregivers own sense of loss, abandonment, and/or anxiety about their own lives (Mitrani et al., 2004; Rousseau et al., 2004). Other children have reported that their caregiver was negligent and physically abusive (Mitrani et al., 2004; Smith et al., 2004). This increases the child's sense of anger at their parents, while at the same time decreasing their

ability to trust in the world. This in turn creates problems with the child forming future attachments.

The length of child-parent separation also appears to influence the process of reunification. A number of studies have shown that the longer the period of separation, the poorer the outcomes when parent and child are reunited (Derluyn et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2004). The negative impact is particularly enduring if the child was very young when the separation occurred (Derluyn et al., 2009). In these situations, the child has no prior relationship with the parent and therefore reports feeling as if they are meeting a stranger with whom they have no history and to whom they owe nothing (Forman, 1993; Rousseau et al., 2001). It should be noted, however, that not all studies have found a significant influence of length of separation on reunification or mental health difficulties in the child (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2002).

When reunification does eventually occur following a lengthy separation, there are a number of new difficulties that the family faces. As mentioned above, children often feel angry towards their parents for leaving them. In addition, the children often form strong bonds with their surrogate caregivers whom they have had to leave behind. This can leave the child feeling vulnerable and alone as they grieve the loss of their caregiver (Mitrani et al., 2004). Parents are often slow to understand the child's resentment of them and the child's wish for the surrogate caregiver. For the parent, this can feel like a rejection of them by the child, and creates further conflict within the family unit (Rousseau et al., 2001).

The guilt that parents often feel about leaving their children is heightened by the child's seeming rejection of them. This can lead to the parents being overly lenient about behaviour and having difficulty establishing rules and providing structure for their children (Mitrani et al., 2004). In addition, the parents often do not have much in the way of parenting experience or skills. This may further exacerbate their difficulties in dealing with conflicts that arise within the family unit (Buki, Ma, Strom, & Strom, 2003).

Furthermore, parents may be struggling with their own difficulties and may not be emotionally responsive to the child's needs. Refugees experience a number of traumas before making it to a safe country, and the accumulative stress of these can take many years to overcome (De Haene, Grietens, & Verschueren, 2010). This, coupled with the lack of parental experience, and possible rejection by their children, can lead to counter-rejection by the parents of their child and emotional distancing (Bernhard, Landolt, & Goldring, 2005; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2002).

Additional stress can arise from the parents' wish for their children to continue traditional practices (Rousseau et al., 2001). The child is often more active in the host community through attending school and having school based friends from different cultures. The child, therefore, often takes on many of the host country's values, behaviours, and traditions (National Child Traumatic Stress Network [NCTSN], 2005). This can lead to conflict as the parents often try to confine the child's behaviours and role to that of their traditional society. The child is faced with negotiating dual cultural identities that may be at odds with each other (NCTSN, 2005). The stress of this, along with feelings of resentment towards the parents for leaving them behind, can lead the child to rebel against the parents, increasing the stress within the family unit.

Spouses who have endured long separations, also face multiple adjustments when they are reunited. Marital breakup is common, especially during the separation, often as a way of putting an end to the uncertainty of eventual reunion (Rousseau et al., 2001). While this may be beneficial in terms of decreasing stress levels, it creates further difficulties for reuniting with children who are now split not only between two countries, but also between their parents. For other couples, the separation may serve to exacerbate their differences and stress (Rousseau et al., 2001). This creates tension at the time of reunification which can negatively impact on the dynamics of the whole family. For some couples, however, the separation serves to increase their bond to one another. This is often associated with their having shared a history of overcoming hardship (Rousseau et al., 2004).

2.5 Impact of Reunification on Mental Health

While separation can create mental health concerns for all members of a separated family, reunification can sometimes complicate matters further. Immediately following family reunification there is usually a brief period of euphoria as family members experience joy at seeing one another and hope is reignited for the future. However, this is often short lived as the reality of recreating new relationships with family, difficulties addressing past trauma and guilt issues, and anger and resentment over the separation surface. In addition, financial hardship is common creating further stress for the family.

Difficulties in familial relationships following reunion are normal in the process of reconfiguration of the family. However, many family members are unprepared for this conflict. Prior to reunification, family members spend most of their physical and mental energy, as well as their finances, on becoming reunited. Their thought is often that once they have their family by their side, everything will be alright again (Wilmsen, 2011). There is a sentiment that life will only start afresh once the family has been reunited and all future dreams are suspended until the day of reunion (Rousseau et al., 2001). However, separation changes family relationships as well as the individuals in many, often unpredictable, ways (Gindling & Poggio, 2010). Unless the family is prepared for this, and is able to be flexible and to communicate with one another, these changes in the family and its members can lead to further mental health crises as the reunion does not live up to the expectations that had been placed on it.

Anxiety and depression are common after reunification as family members struggle to adapt to their new living situation. Resettlement itself has many obstacles that can increase the risk of mental health problems including language barriers, an unfamiliar environment, lack of social networks, and unfamiliarity with social customs (Kinzie, 2006). In addition to these stressors, reunified families have to learn new ways of relating to one another and to create a new family dynamic (Rousseau et al., 2004). When things do not go smoothly, the family is thrown into chaos and there is an increased risk of depressive and anxiety symptoms (Guerin, Elmi, & Guerin, 2006; Wilmsen, 2011). If support that helps the family finding new coping mechanisms and flexibility in roles within the family is not available, mental health crises are likely (Mitrani et al., 2004).

Difficulties following reunification can perpetuate if the underlying issues of guilt, abandonment, and anger are not addressed (Glasgow & Gouse-Sheese, 1995). When the reunification fails to solve all of the family's problems, as is often hoped, feelings of hostility may increase. These feelings stem from latent issues associated with the separation, or from new feelings of misplaced anger as the resettlement process is more difficult than originally envisioned. When these emotions are not expressed and managed in a constructive manner, maladaptive communication patterns emerge (Mitrani et al., 2004; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2002). This leads to the feelings of anger and resentment growing and family relations becoming cracked. As a result, depression and anxiety are common. In addition, behavioural problems are also common in children and adolescents who are reunited with their parents (Mitrani et al., 2004).

Family separation forms ruptures in the family memory and identity. These cracks need to be addressed before family can reform in a positive manner (Rousseau et al., 2004). Addressing the trauma that caused the separation, as well as the possible traumas that occurred during the separation, can be difficult for the family and can lead to increases in depression, anxiety and posttraumatic symptoms (Rousseau et al., 2001; Rousseau et al., 2004). If unmanaged, these symptoms can increase and the stress on the family can cause further discontent among its members. This can lead to an increase in mental health concerns.

Despite the difficulties and potential for an increase in mental health concerns, reunification is often considered to have a positive effect on the long term mental health of family members (Wilmsen, 2011). If managed well, new relationships can form between family members and a new family cohesion can be established. Time, finances and anxiety spent worrying about family members far away, can now be spent on addressing the difficulties of resettlement, and overcoming past traumatic experiences. This leads to long-term benefits for both the individual and society. The new family emerges to act as a bridge between the home and host countries, adding continuity to the individual life story. This helps to heal the wounds that are caused by forced migration (Rousseau et al., 2001). In addition, family can act as a support network that aids the resettlement process, further protecting its members from future mental health crises (Wilmsen, 2011).

2.6 Impact of Family Reunification on Settlement Outcomes

Family reunification influences settlement outcomes for the whole family. Through the reunification process, the family comes together and once more becomes a unified entity that supports the health and well-being of its members. In addition, it supports educational attainment and disseminates core ethics and values (Wilmsen, 2011). Families are the supportive structures that act as mediating structures between society and individuals (Bronfenbrenner, 2004). Therefore, reunification influences participation in the local community, health, employment rates, financial stability, and education.

One core reason for the distress caused by separation is the feeling of not being complete in the new country without extended family (Rousseau et al., 2001). Following reunification this sense of diaspora is minimised and the family can start to build a new life within the host country.

There is an increased sense of wanting to belong, and more commitment to their life in the new country (Rousseau et al., 2004). This can lead to an increase of energy put into finding meaningful employment and communicating with the local population. Through gaining employment and local friends, a sense of belonging is cultivated and the refugee family is further supported in its new country.

The financial position of the family also changes after reunification. Often separated family members will spend a lot of money on their family members still overseas (Wilmsen, 2011). This can be through sending money to them to help ease their financial burden, as well as money spent on the reunification process. Once the family is reunited, those funds can be concentrated on making a new life together in the host country. This has positive effects on the family's stability. It also enables the family to participate more in the local community as they have increased funds to go out in society (Wilmsen, 2011).

However, finances may also be stretched following reunification. Having more people dependent on the primary caregivers on a daily basis can intensify the financial burden, especially if the refugee has been unable to secure well paid employment. Family members arriving in the new country often expect to arrive to riches and comfort and can be disappointed by the reality which is typically far less comfortable. This can translate into a lack of appreciation to the caregiver who has tried so hard to bring their family here (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2002). Thus, this can significantly increase family tensions and stress.

Educational outcomes can also be affected by family reunification. Research indicates that family separation during migration has a negative impact on the educational success of the children (Gindling & Poggio, 2010). As a result of having to flee their country of origin, children's schooling is often disrupted. By the time that they join their parents they are often behind in their education. In the host country, children face a number of obstacles in the education system (Henry, 2009). Firstly, education is given in a language that is unfamiliar and the children have to work hard simply to understand the lessons. Secondly, the children have to form new support groups, often with children who do not speak their language. Forming peer relationships can be particularly difficult if the child is met with racial discrimination.

Further, refugee families are often unfamiliar with the ways that schools function. This creates an added level of stress and uncertainty and, unlike local families, the refugee child cannot lean on the expertise of their parents as their parents are also unfamiliar with the processes (NCTSN, 2005). Finally, home factors such as conflict with the parents, and distress about loved ones back in the country of origin, form a barrier to the child giving their full attention to their school work (Poggio & Gindling, 2010). It is not surprising, therefore, that children who have been separated from their parents during migration are more likely to drop-out of high school (Gindling & Poggio, 2010).

Stress in the educational system creates further tensions for the family. Depending on the family's ability to handle this burden, education can be improved or can suffer following reunification. If the family is able to band together, lending support to each other and especially the children, the child's level of education can be improved (Poggio & Gindling, 2010). This has positive implications for on-going resettlement success and for future generations of the family.

in their new country. However, if the family is unable to communicate their difficulties, tension mounts and new cracks in the family's unity appear. This leads to further difficulties between parents and their children, increased drop-out rates, and poorer outcomes for future employment (Gindling & Poggio, 2010).

Family reunification can influence health and well-being. Extended separation can result in a myriad of physical and mental health ailments caused primarily from the stress and anxiety of being separated.

Once reunification has occurred these concerns decrease, positively impacting on well-being. Furthermore, the family can act as a support network that helps its members overcome difficulties and problem solve obstacles (Wilmsen, 2011). This further protects the family members against reoccurring health complaints. However, as mentioned above, following a honeymoon period after initial reunification, stress can increase within the family unit as the family members struggle to reconfigure the family structure. This re-organisation can lead to increased stress and therefore increased health difficulties which, if unmanaged, can have negative long-term implications.

Overall, family reunification has the potential to improve the family's situation in the host country. This in turn positively impacts on the host country as more of its members are positively engaged in contributing to society. However, there are many obstacles to overcome following family reunification and it is not always a smooth process.

2.7 Protective Factors Aiding the Reunification Process

There are a number of factors that can smooth the family reunification process and reduce the stress involved in recreating family bonds. These can be evident both before, and after, reunification occurs. Prior to and following reunification, communication between family members and making meaning out of the separation are extremely important. In addition, flexibility in family roles can help to ease the difficulties faced when recreating the family unit.

The child's age at the time of separation from the parent/s is likely to have a significant effect on the reestablishment of future relationships. The older the child, the more likely he/she is to have formed strong bonds with his/her parents prior to the separation. This will clearly impact on the reestablishment of these relationships following reunification. In addition, older children can often understand the reasons for the separation better, and hold less resentment towards their parents (Luster et al., 2008). However, the literature also indicates that the older the child is when reunification takes place, the less positive the outcomes for the family (De Haene et al., 2010).

Young children are often more adaptable, and following a period of mourning for their surrogate caregivers left behind, they are usually able to bond strongly with their parents. Adolescents, however, frequently do not bond as easily when reunited with their parents, as they are likely to be more engaged in establishing their own identity (Mitrani et al., 2004). Parents who have been

absent are often overprotective of their adolescent children and reluctant to allow them freedom to express themselves in the new culture (NCTSN, 2005). This can lead to intergenerational conflict and increased stress within the family unit. In addition, the older the child, the more his/her schooling is likely to have been disrupted, creating difficulties with educational attainment. This can further increase family stress as refugee parents often have very high expectations of their children's academic performance (NCTSN, 2005).

During periods of separation, it is important that family members maintain relationships, especially with young children. When strong relationships are maintained, the family member left behind feels loved, even from far away. In addition, family members keep each other psychologically present and therefore a connection between them is maintained (Mitrani et al., 2004). The resulting bonds are important to the establishment of a sense of family identity. This in turn smoothes the reunification process as all family members feel the importance of each other and are motivated to work together to overcome difficulties. Families that do not maintain strong relationships during separation typically feel unsupported and abandoned. Resentment then builds towards the family members who left them. Upon reunification, this resentment is directed at the family leading to a cycle of rejection and counter-rejection (Rousseau et al., 2004). This increases stress and anxiety levels, often leading to both mental and physical health difficulties.

Families that are able to establish a shared understanding of their separation, trauma, loss, and reunion, are likely to experience fewer difficulties during the reunification process (Rousseau et al., 2001). Through forming meaning from the painful experiences of individual family members, the family is able to have faith in the world as a meaningful place, where all experiences encountered are purposeful. This creates a unique family identity which gives its members strength through adversity and shared meaning (Rousseau et al., 2001). This helps the family members to band together and support each other through the often stressful process of reconfiguring family relationships following reunification.

Family roles and dynamics are transformed through the immigration process, especially following long separation (Gindling & Poggio, 2010). Prior to reunification, awareness of this, and acceptance that the family will need to change to incorporate different experiences aids the reunification process (Rousseau et al., 2004). In addition, following reunion, flexibility in the roles of family members, assists the family to adapt to its new society. For example, allowing children to be more outspoken within the family, or having the husband take a more active approach in childrearing while the wife goes out to work are typically counter to the culture of origin for many refugees. However, if the family is open to changes in roles that may enhance its ability to be successful in the new country, the stress of reunification is reduced (Rousseau et al., 2004). This flexibility also allows the individual transformations that have taken place during separation to be expressed, thus decreasing the likelihood of resentment and anger building within the family unit (Rousseau et al., 2004).

2.8 Support Systems for Family Reunification

Considering the enormous impact that separation and reunification can have on the well-being of refugees, as well as on the resettlement of the whole family, it is important to offer services that assist a smooth reunification process and maximise the positive effects of family reunification.

For refugees arriving for family reunification under the Refugee Quota programme, the same sources of support are offered as are given to the family members who first arrived in New Zealand (ChangeMakers, 2009; IMSED Research, 2010). Upon arrival in New Zealand a re-establishment grant is given to them by the government and access to social benefits is granted immediately. Assistance is given in accessing physical and mental health services and volunteer support is available to orientate the refugee and their family into the community. However, family members who arrive in New Zealand via sponsorship are not given access to these services upon arrival. This can result in financial pressure and stress on both the sponsors and their family. Consequently, the family's successful resettlement is likely to be negatively affected (ChangeMakers, 2009). To help to address some of these issues a protocol has now been developed to support positive family reunification in New Zealand (Poole & Swan, 2010).

The literature points to a number of approaches to supporting and improving the family reunification process. These include the provision of services that support families to make meaning out of their separation; that prepare the individual refugee and his/her family, prior to reunification, for changes in personality and roles of family members; that offer support to all family members during the immediate months following reunification; and give parenting support, especially to people who do not have a substantial bond with their children. Overall, support services should be culturally appropriate and specific to the individual case (Mitrani et al., 2004; Rousseau et al., 2004; Steinglass, 2001).

Proper preparation of families for the reunification process is essential. It is well established that separation frequently results in high levels of stress and that the uncertainty associated with the process can negatively impact on family members' health and well-being. Adequate preparation and support helps to ease the impact of the process by minimising the shock of reunion and by providing practical problem solving skills (Rousseau et al., 2004).

Following reunification, appropriate support can assist a family to come to terms with reconfigured family dynamics and the establishment of the family's revised identity. The process of adjustment sometimes requires individuals who have experienced multiple levels of trauma such as separation, loss, war and torture to re-establish themselves with family members who have not undergone and do not understand these experiences. In such cases, treatments that address acculturation processes, the lasting effects of separation and family reconstitution, parenting difficulties, normative changes of adolescents, if appropriate, and posttraumatic stress disorder, are recommended (Mitrani et al., 2004; Steinglass, 2001).

In some cases it is important for families to be able to address their feelings of guilt or abandonment in a safe environment before new and reconstituted relationships can be formed (Schen, 2005). Therapeutic approaches that address such issues are generally more holistic.

They aim to “normalise” the family’s difficulties and to give family members “permission” to talk about their feelings and problems in a way that is often not possible within the day-to-day family context (Rousseau et al., 2004). Such approaches can open communication within the family and offer support and understanding in a non-judgmental way.

Culture has a profound effect on family dynamics, coping strategies, meaning making, and shared experience (Baird, 2009; Rousseau et al., 2004; Sekhon, 2008). For support and treatment interventions to be effective, they must be culturally relevant (Mitrani et al., 2004). They must also be provided in a culturally appropriate manner (IMSED Research, 2010). What works for one culturally group may not be appropriate for another. In addition, while a comprehensive approach can be very helpful, it is sometimes necessary for support services to be specifically tailored to the individual case (Rousseau et al., 2001). Each refugee and refugee family has a unique story. In order to maximise the effectiveness of supportive interventions, these stories must be identified, appreciated and honoured.

2.9 Literature Overview

The international literature highlights many complexities of the family reunification process. It is a priority for governments and refugees alike. The process is, however, often lengthy and there are multiple obstacles that hinder the procedure. Long separations ensue which often result in increased rates of depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic symptoms. In addition, family left in the home country face a series of threats to personal safety and often feel abandoned by their family members. Upon reunification, families face new challenges to creating a new family identity, and addressing abandonment and guilt feelings left over from the separation. These difficulties can further increase the stress within the family unit and result in heightened levels of anxiety and depression. Culturally appropriate and individually relevant support services are recommended. These services should begin before reunification occurs to help the family prepare for the challenge of reunion. The support should continue after the family have been reunited and should address factors such as parenting skills, separation and ambiguous loss, accumulative trauma, and shared identity.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 General Design

This chapter outlines the methodology guiding the design and implementation of the research. This research is underpinned by the assumption that all human interaction is meaningful and has to be understood within the context of social practices (Scott & Usher, 1996, p. 18). An interpretative qualitative research framework was developed, with a view to guiding the researcher and those being researched, to make sense of the social world and experiences of refugee families who have experienced the family reunification process in New Zealand.

Prior to undertaking this study an extensive review of the literature on family reunification was undertaken. In addition, consultation with clinical staff, Community Facilitators and Cultural Link Workers at RASNZ and with clinical staff at the Wellington Refugees As Survivors New Zealand helped to inform the development of key questions and the final design of the study.

Most importantly, as part of the design process, refugee families from a range of ethnic backgrounds were consulted about their views on the family reunification process in New Zealand. Finally, a research advisory group, consisting of representatives from the Department of Labour, RASNZ Community Facilitators and staff, representatives from the Refugee Council of New Zealand, and academic staff from the University of Auckland and Auckland University of Technology was assembled to provide feedback and guidance on the research topic, methods and procedures. During the analysis stage of the research, initial findings were disseminated to the Research Advisory Group for feedback.

3.2 Ethics Approval

Ethics approval for this research was granted by The University of Auckland Human Respondents Ethics Committee (UAHPEC) on the 16th of April 2010 (Reference 2010/034).

Consistent with ethical requirements the planning and implementation of this study adhered to the principle that research respondents have the right:

- to be treated with dignity and respect;
- to be treated fairly, and to have their views considered;
- to have their culture, values and beliefs respected;
- to support person or persons;
- to effective communication;
- to be fully informed;
- to have their privacy respected; and
- to complain.

Ethical issues specific to this project and the techniques employed to manage them were:

- *Seeking informed and voluntary consent:*
Prior to consenting to participate in this research respondents were given verbal and written information about the purpose and structure of the study. They were advised that it would involve them in discussing personal information in the context of family, community, education, and peers. They were also advised that their participation was purely voluntary and that they had the right, at any time, to refuse to answer questions, to stop the interview or to withdraw from the study.
- *Respect for privacy and confidentiality:*
Respondents were given clear and accurate information about the research project and invited to raise any concerns that they had about privacy or confidentiality. It was explained that it would not be possible to guarantee absolute confidentiality in focus groups. However, clear rules such as respecting each other's opinions and not talking about matters discussed outside the focus group were explained fully, and regularly reinforced during the focus group meetings. Interview transcripts and other records were number coded and no names were recorded.
- *Informed Consent:*
Written consent to participate in the study was obtained from all respondents. Consent forms were stored in a locked filing cabinet at the RASNZ base office.
- *Avoiding cultural harm:*
The research team was comprised of researchers from different ethnic backgrounds. Members of the research team were active in their respective communities and familiar with the cultures of the respondents in the study.
- *Additional Ethical considerations:*
The focus groups were sensitively facilitated and any respondents who felt uncomfortable or distressed as a result of matters discussed were supported to access counselling at the earliest possible time. Group facilitators were instructed to stop a session, if required, to enable respondents to receive immediate support. If a respondent chose not to speak or share in the focus group, the facilitators were instructed not to pressure them to do so.

As group settings can be intimidating for some people, respondents were invited to participate in individual interviews if they did not wish to join a focus group.

3.3 Research Design:

The study comprised two phases. In phase one, 13 focus groups were undertaken. In phase two, 15 face to face interviews were conducted.

3.3.1 Focus Groups Recruitment

Focus group respondents were recruited in Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington and Christchurch by research assistants. The research assistants were recruited on the basis of their having extensive knowledge and/or experience of working with refugees and their families. Following the February 2011 Canterbury earthquake, respondents in that region were unable to continue their participation in the study because of more pressing immediate demands.

The four cities included in this study were selected on the basis of their having the highest concentrations of resettled refugees in the country. The diversity of refugee communities included in these cities provided a good cross-section of ethnic representation.

Some potential respondents were initially identified by staff working within RASNZ, the Wellington Refugees as Survivors Trust, and Christchurch Resettlement Services. These people were then contacted by phone by the research assistants in each region. During the initial phone conversation the research assistants introduced themselves, explained the nature and purpose of the research and invited the person to whom they were talking to participate in the research project. If the potential respondent was not interested, they were politely thanked for their time and no pressure was exerted on them to reconsider their decision. In cases where a positive response was received, the potential respondent was advised of the date and time of the focus group in their area, and invited to attend. Strict confidentiality was observed with regards to these initial telephone contacts.

3.3.2 Respondents and Settings

The research sample was selected with a view to providing a range of experiences, perspectives and opinions about the research question. A total of 46 respondents attended focus groups relating to this study. Fourteen of the respondents were male and 32 were female.

Twenty four respondents who attended the focus groups identified as being from Somalia. The remaining respondents were from Afghanistan, Uganda, Sudan, Rwanda, Assyrian Iraq and Arabian Iraq. Respondents' ages ranged from 20 to 70 years with the majority being within the 31-40 year age group. Twenty three respondents had experienced successful family reunification,

19 had experienced an unsuccessful family reunification process and 4 were still waiting the results of their application. This sample size of 46 respondents was considered to be suitably representative for this exploratory qualitative study.

Thirteen focus groups were conducted across Auckland, Hamilton and Wellington. The Auckland focus groups were conducted at the RASNZ Base Office at Mangere. The Hamilton focus groups were conducted at the Waikato Cross Cultural Centre and the Wellington focus groups were conducted in a Community Hall. The majority of focus group discussions lasted for approximately 90 minutes. One focus group in Hamilton took longer because it was conducted in Somali and required an interpreter.

Despite assurances from the researchers and RASNZ's solid reputation within grassroots former refugee communities as an independent, non-government agency, anxiety was expressed by some that participation in the research might somehow detrimentally affect current family reunification applications or requests for Government support.

A few candidates expressed reservations about participating in yet another “*research project about refugees*” and wanted to know what practical benefits participation in the research would have for themselves, their families or their immediate and wider communities. They cited views that numerous reports had been written by government officials or academics without any apparent impact on policies or results that benefit refugees. A few respondents considered that they should be remunerated for participating in the study. To compensate respondents who were required to travel significant distances to the focus groups or interviews, petrol vouchers were made available.

Table 1: Number of focus groups completed in each region

Regions	Numbers
Auckland	3
Hamilton	5
Wellington	5
Total	13

Table 2: Demographic characteristics of respondents in Focus Group and one to one interviews

Gender	Focus Group	Interviews
Male	14	3
Female	32	12
Ethnicity		
Somalian	24	
Afghani	8	1
Ugandian	2	
Sudanese	7	1
Assyrian Iraqi	1	

Rwandian	2	
Arabic Iraqi	2	3
Burmese		2
Columbian		5
Cambodian		1
Laos		2
Age		
20-30	14	3
31-40	17	5
41-50	7	5
51-60	6	2
61-70	2	
Family Reunion		
Reunited	23	5
Waiting	4	3
Unsuccessful application	19	7

3.3.3 Sample Selection Criteria:

To be eligible to participate in this study, respondents were required either:

(1) to have arrived in New Zealand as a refugee and undergone the family reunification process;

or

(2) to be an ex-refugee who was currently waiting to hear the outcome of their application;

or

(3) to be an ex-refugee who had been unsuccessful in a family reunification application.

In addition, respondents in this study were required to live in the wider Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington or Christchurch regions and to be capable of reflecting on and sharing their experiences.

Potential respondents whom, it was considered, were not able to give informed consent or who might be at risk of harm to themselves or to others as a result of participation in the study were excluded.

3.3.4 Focus group discussions

Focus group interview guidelines were developed for the focus group discussions. These guidelines covered the following topics, based on the research questions outlined in chapter one:

1. The meaning of family
2. Expectations and experiences of the family reunification process.
3. Experiences of resettlement in New Zealand
4. The impact of family reunification on the resettlement process
5. The meaning of health and wellbeing
6. The impact of the family reunification process on the health and wellbeing of the respondents and their families.

3.4 One-to-One Case Study Interviews:

Table 3: Number of case studies completed in each region

Regions	Numbers
Auckland	3
Hamilton	7
Wellington	5
Total	15

3.4.1 Recruitment:

Clinicians and staff members working with RASNZ and the Wellington Refugees as Survivors Trust were provided by the principal researcher with information about the study and relevant documentation. These service providers were encouraged to ask any questions they might have about the study and to provide feedback with a view to clarifying or improving the quality of the research.

Potential respondents were initially identified by clinicians working with RASNZ and Wellington Refugees as Survivors Trust, Christchurch Resettlement Services, and contacts in former refugee communities provided through the Refugee Council of New Zealand. Potential candidates were contacted to discuss the study and to learn of their willingness to participate. Those initially then agreeing to participate in the study were then invited to consent to be contacted by a researcher who would discuss the project further with them. It was only at that point any contact details for potential respondents who consented to participate in the research were given to the researcher. Once contact details were received, the researcher contacted the potential respondent by phone.

In a number of cases interpreters were required in order to communicate with potential respondents. Where a potential respondent agreed to participate over the phone, the interpreter

worked with the researcher and respondent to set up a convenient time for the interview in a place in which the respondent felt safe.

3.4.2 Respondents and settings

Fifteen one-to-one interviews were completed for this research. Of the fifteen respondents 12 were female and 3 were male. The largest number of respondents (n=5) came from Columbia. The remainder were from Afghanistan, Sudan, Arabic Iraq, Burma/Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos. Respondents' ages ranged from 20 to 60 years with the majority being within the 31 to 50 age group. Five of the respondents had experienced successful family reunification, 7 had experienced an unsuccessful process and 3 were still waiting the results of their application. This sample size of 15 respondents was considered to be suitably representative for this exploratory qualitative study.

Respondents were offered a range of options as to where they wished the interviews to be conducted. Thirteen respondents chose to be interviewed at their homes and nominated a time that was convenient for them. One respondent chose to be interviewed at an Auckland District Health Board Hospital. The remaining respondent chose to be interviewed at the RASNZ Mt Roskill Office in Auckland.

The range of ethnicities represented in the focus groups varied significantly from the range of ethnicities represented through the one-to-one interviews (Table 2). Whereas the focus groups were predominantly attended by ex-refugees from Africa, Afghanistan and Iraq, the individual interviews extended this range to include ex-refugees from South-East Asia and South America. This effectively increased the potential of this study to explore a wider range of cultural, societal and political perspectives on the experience of family reunification. It also increased the study's potential to examine the relationship between the family reunification process and mental health and settlement outcomes across a wider range of ethnic perspectives.

3.4.3 Sample Selection Criteria:

The sample selection criteria used to select respondents for interviews were the same as the sample selection criteria applied to focus group selection.

3.4.4 Interview Procedures

In the case of interviews that required interpreters, for reasons of cultural respect and courtesy, the researcher did not enter the respondent's home until the interpreter was present. This also avoided the potential for initially distressing first meetings where communication difficulties might have impacted negatively on the trust and rapport between the researcher and respondent.

At the start of each interview, the interpreter introduced themselves and the researcher to the respondent. The respondent information sheet, outlining the purpose of the interview, what was

required from the respondent, how long it would take, how the information would be recorded or stored, and what actions would be taken if any discomfort occurred was then systematically reviewed with the respondent. Most importantly, the respondent was reminded that he/she was free to withdraw at any stage from the discussion with the clear understanding that any information that he/she had provided would be deleted from the research records.

In one instance an interpreter, who was also an experienced RASNZ staff member, at the request of the respondent, completed the interview alone with the respondent. In this case, the researcher supported the interpreter to write detailed notes about the interview on the interview guide provided. The interpreter was also briefed and made fully aware that should any difficulties arise during the interview they were to contact the researcher immediately. However, this was not required. Again, strict confidentiality was observed

Respondents were reminded that their participation in the research project was completely voluntary and that they were free to refuse to answer any questions should they so choose. At this point, the interpreter reviewed the consent form with the respondent, and invited the respondent to give written consent before commencing the interview. Following the interview, respondents were thanked for their time and participation in the study. They were also thanked for allowing the researchers into their home, or for meeting them at an alternative venue.

Based on the preliminary analysis of the focus group discussions, the questions in the one to one interviews enquired into the respondents perceptions of:

1. The safety or otherwise of the environment of the family member with whom they were attempting to reunite. (e.g. Were they in an active war zone? Were they in a relatively safe refugee environment? Were they living in the general community in country of first asylum?)
2. How would the outcome of their application for family reunification impact upon them and for how long did they consider that this impact would last?
3. In cases where their application for family reunification had been successful, had they experienced any particular difficulties? If so, what did they think had caused these difficulties and for how long had the difficulties lasted?
4. In cases where an application for family reunification had been unsuccessful, what was required to happen in order to assist them to move on with their life in New Zealand?
5. Had, and if so in what ways, had family reunification affected their or their family's health and wellbeing?
6. Had, and if so in what ways, had the family reunification process affected their or their family's ability to settle in New Zealand?

3.5 Data Analysis:

Thematic analysis informed by an interpretative phenomenological analysis epistemology was used to analyse the information gathered (Braun and Clark 2006). Thematic analysis involves a review of data gathered to identify any recurrent themes. A theme is identified as a group of linked ideas that suggests similar meanings and often emerges through an inductive process. The focus group and interview transcripts were systematically reviewed to identify topics that indicated a higher order theme. A process of deconstructing and reconstructing the information was applied.

Procedures for analysing the focus group and interview data were as follows:

- Upon completion of a focus groups or one to one interview, the taped records were transcribed verbatim.
- The transcripts were read and re-read to get an idea of the topic and to identify any major issues that emerged during the review of the data.
- Information relating to similar topics was organised into categories.
- Provisional definitions were given for the emerging themes.
- The transcripts were re-examined for relevant data relating to each theme.

In order to increase the rigour and reliability of the data the analysis was completed by two senior researchers in the research team. The analysis of a transcript would initially be completed by one senior researcher and then be reviewed by the other senior researcher. This process was undertaken with a view to increasing the consistency of the interpretation of the data. The initial findings of the analysis of focus group discussions were also sent to the research advisory team for advice and feedback about the quality of data analyses.

3.6 Summary

A qualitative, interpretative approach was used to investigate the experiences of people from refugee backgrounds who had been involved in the family reunification process. Participants represented former refugees who had experienced successful family reunification, ex-refugees who had experienced an unsuccessful family reunification process and ex-refugees who were still waiting to hear the outcome of their application for family reunification.

Approval for the study, the recruitment methods, and data collection procedures was obtained from The University of Auckland Human Respondents Ethics Committee (UAHPEC) (Reference 2010/034) on the 16th of April 2010 before the study was commenced.

The study comprised two phases. In phase one, 13 focus groups, comprising 46 respondents from predominantly African, Afghani and Iraqi backgrounds shared their experiences of the family reunification process. In phase two, 15 face to face interviews were completed. Respondents in

these interviews extended the range of ethnicities represented to include individuals from South-East Asia and South America.

The data obtained through this study were analysed using a thematic inductive approach.

CHAPTER FOUR

EXPERIENCE OF FAMILY REUNIFICATION

Respondents in this study were classified into the following three key groups. Ex-refugees who who had been successful with their family reunification application and had reunited with their family member; ex-refugees who had been unsuccessful with their family application; and ex-refugees who were waiting to either reunite with their family member if their application had been successful, or were waiting to reapply under the tier two category which required family members to have lived in New Zealand for at least three years before the application could be made. Initial analyses were completed for all respondents. Subsequently, the data were re-analysed on the basis of the above categories.

While every effort was made to recruit respondents from a wide range of ethnic background and experiences, the focus group compositions (Table 3) show that the majority of focus group respondents were from the African continent. Furthermore, 50% of the focus group respondents were from Somalia. This focus group composition facilitated a close examination of Somali cultural concepts of family and wellness.

The present chapter highlights respondents' definitions of family and respondents perceptions of facilitators and barriers to settlement. It examines both negative and positive impacts of the family reunification process on the individual and on the family's settlement in New Zealand.

Table 3: Focus Group compositions

Group number	Ethnicity	Male	Female
Group 1 (Auckland) Successful	Afghani		2
	Somali		2
	Sudanese		1
Group 2 (Auckland) Successful	Somali	2	2
Group 3 (Auckland) Unsuccessful	Somali	1	
	Iraqi		2
	Afghani		2
Group 4 (Hamilton) Successful	Somali	3	
	Ugandian	1	
Group 5 (Hamilton) Awaiting outcome	Somali	3	
Group 6 (Hamilton)	Somali	3	

Unsuccessful			
Group 7 (Hamilton) Successful	Somali		4
Group 8 (Hamilton) Unsuccessful	Somali		2
Group 9 (Wellington) Successful	Ugandan		1
	Sudanese		1
	Somalian		2
Group 10 (Wellington) Successful	Assirian Iraqi		1
	Sudanese		2
	Rwandian		1
Group 11 (Wellington) Unsuccessful	Sudanese		1
	Rwandian		1
Group 12 (Wellington) Unsuccessful	Sudanese	1	
	Assyrian Iraqi		1
	Rwandian		1
Group 13 (Wellington) Successful	Arabic Iraqi		1
	Sudanese		1
	Ugandan		1

4.1 DEFINITION AND MEANING OF FAMILY

Statistics New Zealand defines a family as “*a couple with or without children, or one parent and their child(ren).*” This definition contrasts, markedly, with the understanding and significance that many refugee families attribute to this term.

The majority of respondents, (82%) in the present study, defined the concept of *family* as holding much greater significance for them than the one is normally associated with the Western concept of the ‘nuclear family’.

Examples of these definitions included:

A reason for living:

“Family is what I live for every day, I give everything for a family.” (Focus Group 3)

“Family is God’s gift to me, without my family my life would be meaningless.” (Focus Group 2)

“Family is everything to me, they are the core of my life. The strength that keeps me going.” (Focus Group 1)

“Family means the world to me, everything I do and say revolves around my family.” (Focus Group 1)

Freedom:

“Family to me means freedom, I can be free around my family, free to be who I want to be, free to say what I please, free from prejudice, criticism and misunderstandings.” (Focus Group 2)

The sum of happiness, security and love:

“Family to me is happiness, security, respect and unconditional love.” (Focus Group 1)

The idea of living without family included reference to feelings of isolation, displacement and loneliness.

“Without our family we feel alone.” (Focus Group 9)

For 18% of focus group respondents and 33% of interview respondents the definition of family was more closely aligned to that of Statistics New Zealand.

For example:

“Family to me is mother, father, brother, sister, grandparents, uncles, aunties, cousins, extended family and anyone that is near and dear to me.” (Focus Group 1)

“A family is the people you relate to and the ones that you live with, they are the persons who are really close to you.” (Focus Group 3)

However, 69% of responses from the focus groups indicated that definitions of family also extended to tribal or clan-type relationships:

“Family is people who are living together they do not have to be related or they don’t have to be siblings.” (Focus group 3)

“I think family are every one that is related to me starting from great grand parents up to sub clan.” (Focus group 3)

A Myanmar male respondent who had been successfully reunited with his family reported that the togetherness of immediate and extended family is important, due to the roles and support of each family member. For him, the involvement of family, and extended family were greatly important to life. He also stressed the importance of the specific roles of different family members and the importance of these roles to the functioning of the family:

“To me and to us, culturally, family is your foundation. Family is everything. You can't do without family. You can't do nothing [anything] without family. Celebrations, grieving, is [are] not only [for] the immediate family. All the extended family has to involve in your life.” (Myanmar male one to one, successful)

“Immediate family, I mean my parents, and my siblings. What I mean [by] extended family, it's can be even my dad's fourth cousin. And depending on their genealogy, in our culture, we follow the genealogy through our father's side. Also some of your mother's side has to [be] involve in your life. And we usually have 12 families who have to take responsibility for each part of your life. If you have a celebration, one family has a responsibility to cook food for the event. Another family has to slaughter their animals, or something that you have for the celebration. Not everybody can just go and lift the knife.” (Myanmar male one to one, successful)

This respondent also talked about the weakness he feels being alone in New Zealand trying to make it by himself. He specified that the presence of other family, particularly men, would provide more strength for him:

“Because as I mentioned before, one of the other things yeah, in New Zealand that might be difficult to being settled is part of a kind of (59:18) there might be some people who have families here and when you are alone it is very different. It's kind of you are weak. Especially when you have a brother, men family member, male family member, it is kind of make[s] you stronger. In for other people's view as well, and in yourself sense as well.” (Myanmar male one to one, successful)

Furthermore, he explained that family support is vital for maintaining a stable, healthy life and suggested that social problems such as gambling and alcoholism could stem from the absence of a united family:

“And that has impact on our resettlement process. May lead to gambling, it may lead to drinking, it may lead to many other social unwanted issues. So yeah not only getting family members, sometimes for single it might be more important to have a chance to bring someone for spend the rest of their life happily in New Zealand.” (Myanmar male one to one, successful)

4.1.1 Culturally Diverse Concepts of Family

In addition to individual differences in the understanding of family, identified above, further differences are culturally based. For example, people from African backgrounds reported that individuals who are not related are also considered family.

“In an African context a family doesn't mean [just?] a wife, a husband and your children or father and mother. In an African context a family really means all others apart from your own children. Your brothers (not related) are your family, your sisters (not related) are your family. ... So to keep the unity of the family, I needed to bring from each mother, I needed to maybe bring a son to come and stay with me. That is what makes a family strong. But the western way of understanding of a family ...it cannot work.”(Focus Group 13)

In Somalia, you can select your spouse or it can be arranged by family members. For those who can financially support more than one wife, as in customary Islamic tradition, they can marry up to four wives. In urban areas, separate homes are provided for each wife and her children. The level of interaction between each family is dependent about the choices of the individuals involved. In rural areas, if a man has more than one wife, it is more common for them to all reside in a single household, so that they can all assist with the care of the farm and livestock.

“You know the family, what the family I know is my children my father my mother my uncles, all family, my name is [] , [] is my family and also my wife's family is my family.” (Focus Group 4)

“Extended yes it like this gentlemen is my brother, his brother, brothers children is my family. Yes if he is pass away or he can't afford to feeding or is possible to give him a support send a money, my brothers are until growing up, to get position of having enough life yeah, that is what family is.” (Focus Group 4)

As in Sudan, Somalia also has several major clans and many, many sub-clans. Paternal lineage determines membership in a clan. It is common for marriage to occur between clans. When a woman marries a man of another clan, although she still retains connection with her family and her clan, she becomes a member of the clan that she marries into. Responsibility for care and support, therefore, rests not just with the immediate family but also with members of the extended family, and members of the same clan. Responsibility for care of members of the clan, including in laws, appears to be of utmost importance, and to take precedence even if it may negatively impact on a person's ability to improve their circumstances through education.

This is illustrated by the following quotes:

“It is the same as exactly what he is described, but also adding to that, you know welfare system does not exists in countries like Somalia so families rely on each other for support, so if your brother pass away, you will take the responsibility of looking at his the role filling the role he was.” (Focus Group 4)

“Even we believe our religion if your brother passes away you must marry even his wife...You must marry, you look after his children, and yeah you are responsible...or kids loose. No education, no health, I can't afford to marry.” (Focus Group 4)

“Sometimes I say that is my brother’s son, he lives that place, he is under the 18 years, his wife, his mother and also his father is passed away, he is alone, they did not realized this is your family and they say he is your son, you are not married, you are not mum is not immediate person... It’s very important to understand what families means for each specific culture, because the New Zealand Immigration they make this law long time before we are coming here, but we are refugee category, refugee is not point system, the very important issue for coming here is family reunification, they must know New Zealand Immigration what culture for Somalia people or the ethnics to what they believe for families.” (Focus Group 4)

4.2 THE SETTLEMENT PROCESS IN NEW ZEALAND

In 2004, the Department of Labour (2004a), produced the New Zealand Settlement Strategy which identified six key areas relating to positive resettlement outcomes (2004a). These were:

- obtaining employment appropriate to qualifications and skills,
- becoming confident using English in a New Zealand setting, or able to access appropriate language support,
- accessing appropriate information and responsive services that are available to the wider community (for example, housing, education and services for families),
- forming supportive social networks and establishing a sustainable community identity,
- feeling safe expressing their ethnic identity and being accepted by and becoming part of the wider host community, and
- participating in civic, community and social activities.

In 2007 the NZ Department of Labour identified the need to support refugee families to establish themselves in the host community in a way that facilitates their earliest participation in New Zealand’s community and economy as a key priority. Furthermore, it was suggested that the New Zealand Government had a responsibility to provide adequate support for refugee communities to assist them in the settlement process.

In addition, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) expressed the view that the family unit has a better chance of successfully integrating into a new country than individuals on their own. Consequently, it is both in the refugees’ and the host country’s best interests to protect the ‘family unit’ (ECRE, 2000).

4.2.1 Facilitators to the settlement process

Prior to asking respondents how the family reunification process had affected their settlement, they were asked to share, in general, their views on what had assisted and what had challenged or hampered them in the process.

4.2.2 Community/Family/Local support

Eighty percent of focus group respondents reported that social support from within their own community had positively assisted them in the resettlement process. Furthermore, 62% of focus group respondents reported that having family members who had arrived to New Zealand prior to their arrival was a significant source of support.

Specifically, respondents reported that they had been assisted by:

“Having other relatives here who came before us.” (Focus Group 1)

“My family who were here before me.” (Focus Group 2)

“Friends from the same community.” (Focus Group 1)

“Our own communities.” (Focus Group 1)

“Afghani community helped me.” (Focus Group 3)

“My sister helped us to settle in NZ when we arrived, because my elder sister was here before...she showed, hospitals, shopping centers and schools... she used to interpret for us at all times.” (Focus group 5)

In addition, 69% of focus group respondents reported that local support from the host community had assisted their settlement process.

“New Zealanders who found the kindness in their hearts to make this journey a little bit easier for us.” (Focus Group 1)

“New Zealanders that sponsored us.” (Focus Group 2)

“Friends we made in and outside of our own communities.” (Focus Group 2)

4.2.3 Government Agencies/Non Government Organisations/Professional Assistance

Other sources of perceived support included the New Zealand Government which respondents considered had assisted them through the provision of housing, education, health services, the welfare benefit, and a feeling of safety and security:

“The New Zealand Government in-terms of housing and helping us through the welfare system.” (Focus Group 1)

“New Zealand Government helped me by providing the benefit and housing.” (Focus Group 3)

“The New Zealand Government. They give accommodation, housing, education, benefits, safety. We get support from other communities here earlier.” (Focus group 9)

“Teachers, neighbours.” (Focus Group 1)

“Social workers.” (Focus Group 2)

Seventy seven percent of focus group respondents and 53% of individual respondents also reported having received positive and helpful assistance from non government organisations, in particular, Refugee Migrant Services (RMS) (now Refugee Services Aotearoa (RSA)).

“Being the only one from my family here volunteer’s workers did help, Somali community, New Zealand Government, RMS helped me to settle.” (Focus Group 3)

“New Zealand government and volunteers from RMS helped me to settle.” (Focus Group 3)

We had volunteers from the church that went and set up our houses, put things into our houses. People from organizations such as RMS. (now Refugee Service Aotearoa) and Refugees as Survivors (RAS) came in to work with us”. (Focus group 9)

“The laws in New Zealand really provides, in terms of employment because laws in New Zealand that guarantees. Somehow people abuse, it they are creative... migrant refugee service was very helpful.” (Focus Group 4)

“When I was coming here some (people from) Somali community, supported me, like showed me how to shop and how to catch up the bus and also refugee, they also helped me finding me the house yeah.” (Focus Group 4)

4.2.4 Language skills, knowledge and fluency

Having English language skills was reported by 38% of focus group respondents as a key factor that enabled them to both acculturate and integrate into New Zealand’s community.

4.2.5 A positive attitude

Interestingly, Focus Group 2 respondents in particular, reported that an attitudinal perspective positively influenced their settlement process. They considered that a ‘*willingness to integrate*’, and a determination to ‘*never give up*’ assisted them to persevere in developing a new life for themselves, and/or their families, even if some of their family members were proximally distant from them.

Examples of the way in which attitudinal factors were expressed included:

“Our settlement was helped by our willingness to reintegrate into the New Zealand community.” (Focus Group 2)

“It made it hard for me to focus on settling down but I never gave up.” (Focus Group 2)

A further example of how a positive attitude can affect settlement outcomes is evident in the words of a Myanmar male respondent who had been successfully reunited with his family. To him, *‘mental wellbeing means you can function well in day to day life’*. He explains that he... *‘uses the hope of his brother arriving and his anticipation for this as a way of staying in a positive mindset that allows him to have a good wellbeing’*.

“When I start applied, I always think positively. So it's hope, was there. And then that keep motivate me, so in terms of thinking about my wellbeing and to continue another day is one of the big motivation for me. Thinking about your brother will be here someday. So that you are not alone. So those kind of hope and motivations.” (Myanmar, male, one to one successful)

However, the respondent explains that there are also negative sides to this situation. He explains that he feels guilty seeking help from the country, He also points out that he finds it hard to concentrate mentally and focus on his work. In addition, this respondent reports that he still feels like an outsider at times:

“You [are] still seeking help from the country. So it's kind of there are some feeling about guilt as well. And there is some feeling about not complete yet. So some things still needing, always needing. It is difficult to say that I am fully confident now in New Zealand.” (Myanmar, male, one to one successful)

“The good way is about the motivation and the hope. The bad way is there are days and nights that sometimes you can't concentrate when you study. Sometimes when you are working, at your work [you can't concentrate]. Sometimes even difficulty to enjoy your meals and sleep sometimes.” (Myanmar, male, one to one successful)

“Another thing is, again I think I am not feeling 100% comfortable with the new culture and environment yet. Until today, sometimes [I am] still feeling as an outsider.” (Myanmar, male, one to one successful)

A female Afghani respondent also talked about how staying positive was important for her to achieve the reunification process and have good mental health. She explains that a positive attitude is imperative for her to be able to stay on top of her problems:

“So these things is keeping you like but because I had so many experience back in Nauru, and being positive, is keep me gone well. People who actually

didn't have that judgement to keep themselves positive, it's actually gone mental. Like there are so many people I know, they have become mental. Because why? Because they are thinking negative. I mean, every human is like that. Sort of for me, why I kept all this positive is because it's life like that. If you think one negative, the other negative will go on the top of that. because daily life you have so many problems, every day. Doesn't matter who you are. Doesn't matter who you are. Even if you are a President of the country. Still you have problems. So if you thinking of your today you are upset, and another daily based problem comes on top of that one, and tomorrow is the same, so you keeping negative. You are thinking about negatives, you are not thinking about positive.” (Afghani female, one to one, successful)

She further explains that focussing on positives is crucial, as negative thinking means she can't think straight. She also uses positive communication for deflecting rudeness or negativity in others:

“Because see that's the thing, if I thought negative, my brain didn't work. What am I going to do. Because sort of like when you are upset, your brain doesn't work at all. But if you try to be positive, and that positiveness is makes you to think like more positively as like more, it works better.”

“Yes. Like if you , for example, if you have a friend Mr X, he swears at you. And you answer nicely to the person. Sorry what was that? And sort of like, make the person to understand no, you are wrong. We don't actually, you swearing back. Like you nicely talk to him. And that person will shame himself. Shame on me, how could I talk to this person just like this. So you, this person, automatically says sorry to you, because you are being nice to the person.” (Afghani female, one to one, successful)

4.2.6 Religious organisation

Seventy-three percent of interview respondents identified the church, mosque, temple, or members of these places as being helpful in supporting them in the resettlement process. Particularly, they reported valuing the opportunities to build supportive social networks.

For my case, I think I put my faith and my trust in God. And with the members of my parish who supported me. Make me feel a bit settled...Because when I lived in Africa, my connections with my parish was great and I did quite a lot to make myself accessible to my parish and to my community. (Focus Group 10)

4.2.7 Social freedom

Social freedom is an important aspect of settling into New Zealand. An Afghani female who successfully reunited with her family discussed the importance of understanding and embracing the social freedoms available in New Zealand compared to her home country. The respondent explained how the freedom that women have in New Zealand had helped her with her own resettlement:

“Well, to have a freedom and is no always pushed around like with the people back we had in Afghanistan. Women didn't have rights. Kind of with the people back we had in Afghanistan, women didn't have the right to do anything, but they have here.” (Afghani female, one to one, successful)

In addition, this respondent noted that it was important for her parents to study English, not so much for their education, but to be involved with New Zealand society:

“But my main point was not to actually educate them for English. My point was to involve them with society in New Zealand. To get them not isolated in the room. Because usually people I know, so many people once comes to New Zealand, they are always isolated. Even New Zealanders. They get isolated.” (Afghani female, one to one, successful)

The respondent explained that the social boundaries are different, and strangers can be appealed to for help:

“Like people who, I mean, basic daily life. Like even I learn that if you are on the street, you don't know anything. You just ask people.” (Afghani female, one to one, successful)

“Other people that you work with. You socially, like involved with them. It doesn't matter whatever you going to library. Even your dairy on your street and things like that. So you that's where you don't know the answer, ask people. Doesn't matter who you are, just ask them. You get to find out the answers. So that's how I survived. Just ask people.” (Afghani female, one to one, successful)

This respondent also acknowledged the challenges provided when living in a different social setting:

“But for people who didn't know, for example like in New Zealand, like if I didn't know you, if we just somewhere comes somewhere in a party and things like that, we start communication just like that. Just like that. Even if you don't know the person. Just like that. But for our culture is very unexpected to have someone come in and straight away talk to you. Like for example, one day I was in the bus stop. Just this is an example. The guy came and start

talking about the wedding that he is attending.” (Afghani female, one to one, successful)

4.3 BARRIERS TO THE SETTLEMENT PROCESS

A wide range of factors were identified that had hampered respondents’ ability to integrate and settle into New Zealand society. These included language difficulties, family separation, lack of employment opportunities and adjusting to a new environment, culture and customs. In addition, perceptions of racial discrimination and intergenerational conflict and anxiety were also identified as barriers to the settlement process.

4.3.1 Language

Eighty five percent of focus group respondents and 80% of one to one respondents identified language as a significant barrier to settlement.

“Difficulties is language problem. Because some of us came from Africa, we don't know how to speak in English and communication becomes very difficult. And also getting a job is very hard because if you don't have NZ qualifications you won't get a job. Also too many rules, very hard to follow.....for reunification. Like meeting the criteria, the immigration policy... many things in the criteria.” (Focus Group 12)

“The children are very important because my boy he kind of settle here and my daughters are doing well. My husband also, he kind of found his way now too, he's studying what to do, he found a way to. For me, I don't feel very well settled here because the obstacle is the English language and I feel I need to get that and I haven't, you know, to be fully settled.” (Focus Group 10)

4.3.2 Family Separation and concern over the welfare of family left behind

According to the Department of Labour’s recent 10+ Study on refugees who have settled over 10 years, (Department of Labour, 2010) former refugees expressed strong views on settling in New Zealand in relation as to how families played a pivotal role. Reasons included providing practical support, strong emotional relationships and local knowledge, and guidance for young people. The report further stated that for former refugees who participated in their Quota refugees 10 years on research, (DOL 2010) an indication of being well settled was having close family in New Zealand. The research also highlighted the significant emotional and financial costs involved as a result of family separation and concern about family living overseas.

Eighty-five percent of focus group respondents and 73% of interview respondents, irrespective of whether they were eventually successful with reuniting with family members or not, reported

feeling unsettled because the emotional connections persisted with family members in spite of separation by distance. Furthermore, concerns/worries about loved one and their fate, including welfare and safety, presented ongoing concerns that had hindered the respondents ability to settle.

“I initially felt unsettled as I was always emotionally connected to them.”
(Focus Group 1)

“It initially made it hard for me to focus on settling down when you have family overseas that you don’t know what their fate would be.” (Focus Group 1)

“Well for me it made it impossible because as you can imagine, life was hard without my better half.”(Focus Group 2)

Some respondents reported that having family overseas appeared to act as a motivator for them to work harder in order to support family members to have the opportunity to also, possibly, have a life in New Zealand.

“It made my process of settling down easier because I knew that I had to work hard so that I can help them if they were to get here.” (Focus Group 1)

Forty-six percent of focus group respondents and 77% of interview respondents reported feelings of guilt, and difficulty in settling when struggling with the thought that their loved ones were in much more difficulty situations than themselves.

“It made it hard when you have to worry about family that are far away and aren’t as privileged as us.” (Focus Group 1)

“For the most part I felt unsettled because it was hard having to picture what your loved one was going through each moment I was trying to enjoy this new environment.” (Focus Group 2)

“Although I have a perfect job and also well paid I am always thinking back home and how my family is doing. I always think it is unfair for me to have this good life and that I don’t deserve it if my families are not here.” (Focus Group 3)

A Myanmar female, who was waiting to be reunited with her children reported that having the family unit together in one place was the most important thing for settling. This is the underlying theme and influences the other themes. This theme dominates the interview, and it is apparent that reuniting with her family is the most important part of successfully settling into life in New Zealand. Understandably, as a Mother she cannot feel comfortable while her family are potentially in danger and she is not informed of how they are doing. Early on in the interview it was determined that the respondent felt that it was fundamentally important for her family to be together, as a unit, even if some family members had begun their own families:

“Being a mother, [a] family means I want my son , [my] children to be with me, even though they are grown up and even though they get married. I want to see them. I want to live them together.” (Myanmar, female, one to one waiting)

This respondent clearly highlighted the importance of her being informed about the family reunification process and her associated excitement and high hopes. She described how she had gone to all lengths to make this happen as quickly as possible, filling out applications as soon as she can, and hiring 3 lawyers. Furthermore, this sense of family extended to her sons who, clearly, wished to be joined by their brothers:

“Yes so I can feel that he what he can feel because he always asking about his brothers. He is younger than the two brothers.” (Myanmar, female, one to one waiting)

This theme ran strongly through the entire interview and, several times when asked questions that were unrelated, the respondent returned to the need to be reunited with her family as quickly as possible:

Interviewer: [abridged] Are there other things that affect her health, not family reunification, is there other things that affect that?

Respondent: I think that everything is alright, I think in New Zealand. But only what I need is my family. (Myanmar, female, one to one waiting)

Family separation is clearly linked to anxieties that can negatively impact on resettled refugees’ day-to-day lives. This worry is seen to be detrimental to mental health, as highlighted by the following:

Interviewer: How does it affect your health and wellbeing?

Respondent: So I feel like I am always worried about my children. When they are here, I don't have to worry about anything, so kind of a less worry. So I will be happy. (Myanmar, female, one to one waiting)

This worry also extends to the respondent’s son who is with her in New Zealand. The concern for family members who have not yet made it to New Zealand clearly impacts negatively on the mental well being of resettled refugees and makes their settlement harder. It also increases their difficulties with learning English, which in turn negatively impacts on their settlement. This idea is put forward by the interviewer:

Interviewer: “That was my thinking when I asked that question about concentrating, learning English. Whether some of it is the worry is affecting her ability to remember the English.” (Myanmar, female, one to one waiting)

4.3.3 Employment

The third most significant factor raised as a barrier to settlement was the issue of employment. For example, a Myanmar male who had been successfully reunited with his uncle reported in his one to one interview that earning money and establishing a job was of primary concern to him. He described the way in which getting money together to help his family was one of his greatest challenges, and that difficulties associated with this negatively affected his wellbeing:

“The finance, when you think about, when I think about the process and the tasks that I have to do, all the tasks. It's very stressful actually. When you send a document to him, until you get information from him that he received it, every day you think it, you check every day your email. And yeah so it's, something's always somewhere out pressuring me. So it's always kind of under pressure and worries. And also another thing is back again to think about finance. (I) need to work, need to save money. And also concentrating, when I think about working, earning money, I just can also forget about study and other part of my life as well. So it's kind of too much going on all the time.” (Myanmar, Male, one to one successful)

The respondent also referred continuously to financial issues throughout the interview, including fees for his brother's documentation and money to help his uncle:

“As soon as I arrived to Wellington, after spending 6 weeks in Mangere. Because in Mangere I just said it verbally, I didn't lodge the application yet. And when I started to thinking about officially lodging that application, the cause, the files cost I have to pay \$70. And as a new arrival, I have to save that \$70 from my earnings first. So it took me about 3 months again to save \$70 for the application.” (Myanmar, Male, one to one successful)

“And also at that time one of my uncles, my mum's younger brother in Malaysia was arrested and deported to Thailand border. So I have to send money to rescue him from the, we call them agent but human trafficker... They will send him to the fishing boat. So I have to.” (Myanmar, Male, one to one successful)

The respondent considered that the necessity for him to obtain work compromised what he wanted to do for a career. He also reported that he believed that his status as a refugee negatively influenced the work opportunities available to him:

“I think the basic, the main thing is the two things that bring to difficulties in finding a job and I do got a job, but if I don't get the job I think my pathway might be completely different. I might end up in the kitchen. Or I don't mean working in a kitchen is not a proper job, but it's not my goal, my career pathway. And yeah. Because now in that starting back from zero, never, I can remember thinking that I can be in the same level as people who are in my age group”. (Myanmar, Male, one to one successful)

Challenges in obtaining employment were reported by 69% of focus group respondents and 73% of one to one respondents.

“Finding employments is a problem to settlement.”(Focus Group 2)

“And also getting a job is very hard because if you don't have NZ qualifications you won't get a job.” (Focus Group 12)

“Getting a job here is sometimes quite difficult. Because you have to get one and if you cannot get one then you cannot support your family. Both here and back home. You are paying school fees for our family members who are still at home, we are paying for their maintenance.” (Focus Group 10)

4.3.4 New Environment, Culture and Customs

Other identified barriers to the settlement process included being away from home, and from the environments that the respondents were familiar with. In particular, not knowing the norms of the land and the people; not knowing where to buy food that was sanctioned by their religions; the weather and a lack of transport or lack of funds to pay for transport.

“So many things needs taking care of like adjusting to New Zealand and the reunification process is utterly hard therefore it had a negative impact on my ability to settle in New Zealand.” (Focus Group 2)

“Because I was coming new life new country new people, it is very hard to settle this country to integrate.” (Focus Group 4)

“The first the problem was family, when I was coming my son was 27 days old and also my daughter was 4 years old in Somalia and I when I came here I don't have enough money to live to pay rent, phone and electricity and also my daughter and family was waiting me to help and that is very struggle.” (Focus Group 4)

“When were Africa, can take your children with you and know everywhere but here you can't take children with you, I can't drive.” (Focus Group 5)

4.3.5 Discrimination

Fifty-four percent of focus group respondents highlighted discrimination as a significant barrier that had negatively impacted on their ability to integrate and settle. For example, the Somali focus group respondents discussed examples of media discrimination:

“There is a bit of discrimination in this country, there was something on TV, last night, the Indian governor who was born here, and pretty much kiwi, and

the news reporter abusing him like, offending saying like. What are they pick someone who looks the same kiwi, sounds like same...Saying you can picture what kiwi should like. It is ridiculous, like this country is multicultural country and people like should allowed to say whatever they want on TV.” (Focus Group 4)

“Still struggling to settle in New Zealand....New Zealand sees itself as a country of compare to Australia low level of discrimination, but I think that New Zealand has very high level of discrimination which prevents people to integrate, which prevents people to able to contribute. (Focus Group 4)

This focus group also referred to their perceptions of policy and racial discrimination:

“I would say your policies are racists, I meant it makes things difficult, it’s based on one culture not multicultural based.” (Focus Group 4)

“I would say that policies are stereotyping, like discrimination because they created this IPG group which is Immigration profiling group unit, which I had to go through for my wife’s visa residency. They deal with people from so called high risk individuals from countries like Somalia. So for me like that group is racists and I would say they look at their policies a bit more fair.” (Focus Group 4)

“So can you speak to with some one, if I haven’t accent, I have got an accent and I speak some one on the phone, it will be different when I see face to face, because quickly you can see that they your appearance, and if you have accent they will be quickly give them ideas about yours self which they have already received in that side.” (Focus Group 4)

4.3.6 Intergenerational conflict

Two focus groups referenced intergeneration conflict as a factor that negatively affected settlement. For example, as the following quote illustrates, as a result of media influence and western schooling, the younger generation begins to take on values that are different to those of their parents. This can result in culture clashes, less engagement and participation in the schooling system, and limited opportunities for academic attainment.

“It is big culture clash, the old people and the young people, because the young going to the school, watching movies and then came to the home and the mum is still Somalian mum and she says stop this, they say this is New Zealand. And he [the son] is running away to Wellington, he got money, he get car, and they all miss schools and they all run. That is causing big culture clash.” (Focus Group 4)

4.3.7 Anxiety

Another barrier identified by one focus group was that of adjustment anxiety related to the respondents' ability to cope and develop skills to improve functioning and integration in the new environment. This focus group also discussed situations where anxiety could further limit a person's functional capacity by hindering their ability to go outside their home. If such situations persist, significant psychosocial problems can develop.

"Because all of those things are difficult to do, because of the anxiety it would be difficult to even attempt to go out the front door." (Focus Group 9)

4.4 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FAMILY AND ITS IMPACT ON SETTLEMENT

Significantly, 85% of focus group respondents and 87% of interview respondents reported the absence of family as being the greatest impediment to their successful resettlement. Feelings of being incomplete because a critical, and significant part of their life was missing were most frequently reported. Notwithstanding the comprehensive range of provisions in place to support their resettlement, these respondents reported feeling continuously unsettled without family members present.

"Even though New Zealand is my home now, it just doesn't feel completely home without my family." (Focus Group 3)

"It made it harder because it takes a long time to reunite with our families, no matter how hard you try to settle down, there would always be a missing part of your life that you can't do without." (Focus Group 3)

"I feel unsettled and unhappy, I will continue to feel this way until I see my family, I would feel this way whether I'm in New Zealand or in another country because that's just part of being human, nothing against New Zealand." (Focus Group 3)

An Afghani female respondent who had been successfully reunited with her family, described, during her one-to-one interview, how having immediate and extended family together is important for supporting the home. The respondent explained the importance of having the extended family all in one house. She contrasted this to New Zealand culture where, upon coming of age or marriage, people traditionally leave the house:

"In the same home. Like in when you did all that, and you are sort of 20-25 sometime you stay with the family or in the city, but in New Zealand like if you are 18 you are entitled to get out of the house. No one tries to stop you or even if you stay longer, then Mum and Dad will kick you out of the house. But in our society we actually hardly we do that. And we all just attached to each other." (Afghani female, one to one, successful)

The respondent went on to explain that in her culture, the grandparents, parents and children remain in the same house and share roles in the household which help the family. The traditional family unit is the foundation of family life in her culture:

“In Afghanistan the person who is doing the babysitter was who will be the grandfather and grandmother. So in this way, what you do is, you look after the grandfather and grandmother, just, sorry the Mum and Dad. And what they do is the look after your children and they do the washing and cooking's and things like that. But you go to work and your wife is going to work, depends on the situation. Mostly farmers, and things like that. But still if is not, they are in a city, still (3:45) the same system. So and so that's how it works. How the society in Afghanistan is, too close to each other. And that's why I really kind of like, couldn't stand for so many years, without my family.” (Afghani female, one to one, successful)

Three interview respondents specifically discussed the way in which they felt that anxieties arising from family separation had impaired their ability to focus on developing their language skills, furthering their education, seeking and gaining employment or developing relationships with potential social networks. They attributed this situation specifically to concerns and anxiety associated with the family reunification process.

“Settlement outcome is compromised and negative because I struggled to focus without my family with me. Therefore people who are separated underperform because the focus is with the family. In European, you rely on the state, while in Africa, you rely on family. When a situation goes wrong, you rely on the family to support you.” (Sudanese male one to one successful)

4.4.1 Scarcity of resources and financial demands

In addition to time and energy expended, 73% of interview respondents reported that they had had to allocate significant financial resources to their efforts to reunite with family. These respondents referred specifically to the costs involved in obtaining necessary papers, frequent communication, supporting travel expenses for loved ones who were required to get to places where legal documents needed to be completed and to completing required medical tests.

“I spent a lot of money, time and energy but they have been decline, so they cannot settle New Zealand. I was thinking that we all settle in New Zealand, but here for me it is nothing, it does not test good to me. In general the life in this country is good for my other families who are here. I still support my family to send money to them.” (Focus Group 8)

4.4.2 Positive impacts on settlement outcomes

Seven focus groups were conducted with respondents who had been successful with their applications to reunite with family members. Although reporting that the period of waiting to

find out the outcome of their applications was ‘unsettling’, they overwhelmingly reported a positive impact on their ability to settle when reunified with family members.

The knowledge itself that they would soon be reunited with their families was viewed as facilitating the settlement process.

“For the most part it made the whole process of settling down easier knowing that I was able to reunified with my family” (Focus Group 1)

The importance of sharing responsibility for daily tasks within the family was also identified.

“Now I have people who shares with me taking children to school, and less phone bills.” (Focus Group 7)

Respondents within the seven successfully reunited groups further reported that once reunited, they found it easier to develop skills, access resources and support themselves and their families to maximise opportunities presented such as education and employment. Prior to being reunited, all of the focus groups discussed psychological difficulties such as worry about loved ones left behind and the negative effect that this had on their ability to pay attention or focus on the task of resettlement in New Zealand.

For example, a female Afghani who was successfully reunited with her family initially detailed the negative effects that isolation from her family had on her wellbeing. She contrasted this with her improved outlook once her family was with her:

“To be well. The thing is being well is the problems, like sort of to those people who are under pressure of this kind of things. You will affect your life, and wellbeing. How it works is you are upset because of your application doesn't work. You are alone. Your family is not here. You are under the pressure of supporting them.” (Afghani female, one to one, successful)

“Well it's so much improved. Because I feel so much better because my family is here with me. And I know what they need. And they know what I need. Sort of like, sort of as supporting each other. And aware of what's going on in life with them. Without, if they sick, I know I have to take them to Doctor. And they are safe as well. Comes to the safety, they are safe. They are no longer in danger. Their life, every day is in danger. You don't know whether things is going, it's not that but it's just only safety, like worst comes to the bombing and things like that, this is what we are talking about, Pakistan. So those things you don't have any more. You are here safe.” (Afghani female, one to one, successful)

4.4.3 Longer term consequences

While the majority of respondents who had successfully reunited discussed positive outcomes such as being able to provide children with the opportunity to gain a higher level of education,

She's trying to say, as a family, because the children are here that makes you really feel[settled], you know, because they are able to go to school, to get educated and understand. That one I agree with her, when my family came, my son that came, been doing very well... soon he's finishing university and we are proud of him and others who are still continuing with their learning so that is good. (Focus Group 10)

when queried about longer term effects of being reunited, themes of changes to the family dynamic and negative psychological consequences, such as depression were also identified. In particular, these issues appeared to arise if the expectations of reunified family members providing help and assistance once they have grown up did not occur.

"I felt responsible that I'd brought them here and if something goes wrong it makes me feel sad. I want them to go out, to be successful people but if they're not doing what you want them to do then that becomes a problem. You'll always have that disappointment." (Focus Group 9)

If they're kids they are supposed to grow up and help you back. [If not] you feel some depression. (Focus Group 9)

4.5 RESPONDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF HOW THE FAMILY REUNIFICATION PROCESS HAD AFFECTED THEIR SETTLEMENT

When asked specifically how their experiences with the family reunification process affected settlement, all focus group and one to one respondents highlighted the difficulties caused by being separated from family. They reported, particularly, that they found it hard to adapt because of worrying about the welfare of family members left behind.

"It made it hard when you have to worry about family that are far away and aren't as privileged as us." (Focus Group 1)

"It initially made it hard for me to focus on settling down when you have family overseas that you don't know what their fate would be." (Focus Group 1)

"I initially felt unsettled as I was always emotionally connected to them (Focus Group 1)

"Well for me it made it impossible because as you can imagine, life was hard without my better half." (Focus Group 2)

They reported feelings of being unsettled (even if they might have indicators identified as a 'successfully settled person') and the struggle with the tension of enjoying a new life in New

Zealand while worrying about what life and conditions for loved ones not with them might be like.

“For the most part I felt unsettled because it was hard having to picture what your loved one was going through each moment I was trying to enjoy this new environment.” (Focus Group 2)

“It made it hard for me to focus on settling down but I never gave up.” (Focus Group 2)

Five focus groups, which included two successfully reunited respondents, two respondents who had been unsuccessful with their application, and one who was waiting to reunite with her family discussed feelings of discouragement and feeling like giving up, specifically because of the hard and long process of trying to reunite with family members.

“Sometimes I feel like giving up and just to go back because it’s hard not having your loved once here enjoying life like I am, so of course settling in New Zealand was made hard.” (Focus Group 3)

4.6 SUMMARY

This chapter discusses the respondents’ definitions and meanings of family, including its significance to them. The chapter further presents information about respondents’ perceptions of settlement; what has facilitated a positive settlement, and what has acted as barriers to the settlement process. An analysis of the impact of family reunification on settlement outcomes is also presented.

CHAPTER FIVE

PSYCHOSOCIAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Miller and Rasco (2004) state that the majority of displaced people come from non-Western societies. Consequently, these people’s understanding and responses to emotional distress generally differ significantly from the models and approaches that guide the work of Western trained mental health professionals. Consequently, it was considered critical to ascertain respondents’ particular understandings and definitions of health and wellbeing, so that an analysis of the impact of the family reunification process could be more accurately understood from their unique perspectives.

This chapter discusses the psychological and emotional issues faced by former refugees in coping with the family reunification process. It further discusses some of the consequences that

occur when an application is successful or unsuccessful or the individual is left waiting for what can sometimes be a prolonged period.

5.1 CULTURALLY DIVERSE CONCEPTS OF HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Ninety percent of focus group respondents and 67% of one to one respondents discussed health and wellbeing in terms of positive behaviours and actions which an individual would be able to undertake. For example, these respondents identified good health and wellbeing as including the ability to raise a family, to cook, to care for children and to obtain employment. Functional aspects of this kind appeared to be stronger indicators of health and wellbeing than attitudes for both focus group and one to one respondents.

“Raising a family, living proper life, because if you are not happy then you cannot raise family.” (Sudanese male one to one successful)

“Humanity depends on health and wellbeing, having it makes me a person who can be something within this society.” (Focus Group 3)

“Everything. Being healthy is being able to cook, to look after my son. Being healthy means a better life. So I'll be able to have an experience, have a job. I am housewife but I want to be something more. Can't study, can't work because of my health.” (Focus Group 13)

The ability to enjoy activities was discussed by three focus groups. Furthermore, the ability to participate in activities they enjoyed was identified by five of the 13 focus groups as the meaning they attributed to health and wellness.

“Health is about whole wellbeing of an individual, mental, psychological, physical. You have to be able to do something.” (Focus Group 9)

“Also it is to live a normal life, being able to work and just enjoying anything that you do.” (Focus Group 1)

“It also means being able to do the things in life that you enjoy the most because if you are not healthy you are very limited.” (Focus Group 1)

Positive health and wellbeing was described as more than just a physical state:

“Health and wellbeing to me is being strong, body and mind and being able to carry out any task.” (Focus Group 2)

psychological, social, spiritual:

“Being happy and spiritual.” (Focus Group 4)

and emotional wellness, where an individual was free from worry,

“I used to be upset for most of the time. People probably thought I was a troublemaker. To be free of worry and to have the family here, behind me, with the children here, that is health and wellbeing.”(Sudanese male one to one successful applicant.)

but also an attitude of happiness. Thirty-eight percent of focus group respondents discussed wellbeing as being excited in relation to the ability to feel excitement about life, about the things that they are engaged in, about their surroundings and about the future.

“To me it is to lead a happy and joyful life.” (Focus Group 2)

“Happy and excited.” (Focus Group 4)

“For me its means a long and happy life.” (Focus Group 1)

“You’re happy you are not worry.” (Cambodian Female, one to one Awaiting outcome)

It was further identified as being extremely important, and as a goal for 69% of focus group respondents and 67% of one to one interviewees. Health and wellbeing was discussed in terms of something respondents worked hard to achieve, and to take care of.

“For me it’s very important because only then would I be able to take care of my family.” (Focus Group 1)

“Healthy and wellbeing is an everyday goal for me, every decision I make revolves around this goal.” (Focus Group 1)

“It is everything for me and I work hard to stay healthy.”(Focus Group 1)

“Health and wellbeing to me is one of the most significant things in life, it is something that you need to guard and take care of.” (Focus Group 2)

Interestingly, for one focus group the priority and significance of health and wellbeing was second to that of the respondents’ family and children.

“For me it is the most important thing after my family and children.” (Focus Group 2)

Four focus groups and 11 of the one to one interviews also discussed health and wellbeing as not only critical for themselves, but also for their families.

“For me it’s a worry because I have to not only think about my health and wellbeing but also my family’s because I want everyone I love to be healthy and happy.” (Focus Group 1)

For the majority of respondents, good health and wellbeing was characterised by a strong body and mind, the ability to function across a wide range of domains such as education, family and employment, a positive attitude, the ability to derive enjoyment and excitement from activities and the ability to participate in activities that bring joy and excitement. Seventy-seven percent of focus group respondents considered that the absence of health and wellbeing would result in their not living a good life and/or experiencing a life without meaning.

“Actually without health, you can’t have anything meaningful in life and that includes family.” (Focus Group 2)

“Without both of them I would not be living in a good life.” (Focus Group 3)

“I do want to have good health so that I can look after my children I have responsibility of looking after my children. The most important thing is health. If you have good health you will be able to build your way through life. You’ll have a good family, good children, good husband, a better life. But if you are unhealthy, if you are unwell then you cannot do anything Being physically, mentally, spiritually sound and healthy. When you combine all that. That gives you the motivation of doing things for yourself and for your family and others because you are able to work and able to see things. But if your health is poor that creates mental, become unstable, you get stressed, you become sick.” (Focus Group 10)

As the above quote illustrates, the opposite of being well or healthy was considered to result in an individual’s inability to function or ‘do anything.’ This respondent further extrapolated that such a state would lead to ‘mental’ issues, with the person with poor health becoming stressed and sick.

An absence of worry was reported by 78% of focus group respondents as an indicator of wellness.

“To her, living well means that you have nothing to think about. You are living well, everything is there but in her sense she has got the thoughts here and the thoughts also there. More importantly, her daughter is starting to get mental disturbance, getting mentally unwell back home because of thinking about her here and also she is thinking about her. So the whole thing actually affects the way of her thinking about her daughter is affecting her as well as affecting the daughter there. And in that sense she is not living as a whole person. Eating well but not sleeping well because it’s always, her mind is always racing, thinking and thinking.” (Focus Group 11)

5.2 FACTORS ATTRIBUTED TO POOR HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Focus group participants and individual interviewees identified three key factors or stressors that they believed contributed to poor health and wellbeing for them. These included concerns about family suffering back home; the family reunification process; and financial responsibility/pressure.

5.2.1 Family suffering back home

Respondents in 11 focus groups reported that the most significant factor that contributed to their poor health and wellbeing was concern about the welfare of members of their families. This was also identified in 13 of the 15 one to one interviews.

“Family suffering in Somalia like your brother and sister then you cannot be happy, because they will be calling you in the middle of night, so will be worry on not helping them.” (Focus Group 4))

“It depends where is your family, what is the situation where your family is. And if your family is safe, in a place where it is safe, and you are here safe and then you may say like at least some of my relatives are, or some of my families are in a safe place even though the disturbance is there from being lonely because you are so far from each other it could be too much. So it is good because in our days there is a technological way you can communicate, you can talk to each other, you can feel the moment you can talk to each other you can be oh you have seen each other, something like that. And that will also bring a bit of relief if they are in a very safe place. But if they are not in a safe place that is where you can become so worried. Because you don't know, today you are staying, you don't know what is happened. And the moment there is a phone call ring, automatically you thought something has happened. Those things will keep on disturbing.” (Focus Group 13)

A Cambodian female who is waiting to reunite with her son reported that the separation from her son, and the danger he is in causes the respondent stress and negatively effects her settlement into New Zealand. This respondent established early in the interview that her children are the main part of her family, and that they are most important to her. She explained that her son is currently in danger and an unsafe location:

“The children is my family. My husband, when he was around would be the family. But when he is not, the children is mainly my family now. I used to think that my mother was part of the family too. But really the children is the main.” (Cambodian female, one to one, waiting)

“He is facing like beatings sometimes, and robberies. So it's not very safe there. No, he has to move his address from time to time, and try to escape the arrests from the authorities.” (Cambodian female, one to one, waiting)

The respondent explained that the main problem with settling in New Zealand is the separation of family. She says she has no other problems with the children that are here as they are safe, but the child that remains separated causes worry:

“One of the difficulties is like not having all the family members here. Like my son. I have got other children that from my late marriage here, but they one from the previous one is still away. That cannot get here. And when I applied to immigration, there is a lot of strict rules that we could not follow. And that makes the case very hard to fulfil.” (Cambodian female, one to one, waiting)

The respondent concluded by saying that a speedy process of reunification would alleviate her worry as family is the most important aspect of her life:

“Because the family living together is the most important part. And I think that if in this case, like my case, as a mother and son, if I happens quick, it would help a lot.” (Cambodian female, one to one, waiting)

5.2.2 The Family Reunification Process

Regardless of whether respondents were successful in being reunited or unsuccessful with their application, all focus group and one to one interview respondents agreed unanimously that challenges and problems encountered with the family reunification process negatively affected their health and wellbeing.

“I felt very stressed due to the family reunification process and as result I required counseling because I wasn’t able to sleep most nights. The counseling helped quite a lot” (Focus Group 3)

“I also felt depressed and unhealthy during the wait period and there wasn’t much that I could do to change that.” (Focus Group 3)

5.2.3 Financial responsibility

Eight focus groups reported financial concerns, including the responsibility for financially supporting family members overseas, and the financial cost of reunifying with family members as having a detrimental impact on their health and wellbeing.

“I am less worry because I have reunited with my husband. So things are much better now...I doing think much, not much worry, no more paying lawyers and my husband shares the money we spend, so I spend less money now.” (Focus Group 7)

This is illustrated in the case of a Cambodian female who was waiting to reunify with one of her children. She discussed in her one-to-one interview that the financial support required for the respondent's son overseas is causing conflict with her other children who are in New Zealand.

The respondent explained that the reunification process had caused conflict in her family, due to the fact that the children that are here and the child she is trying to bring into the country have different fathers:

The other one was affecting the family, because it affects the children. As the children that I have here belongs to a different family, different father, they don't want to have much to do with the other family. So there is conflicts in the family as well. And it really makes me very, very feel sick. And a lot of times I don't even want to think about it. (Cambodian female, one to one, waiting)

She specified that due to the financial support required for her child overseas, there is a feeling of jealousy amongst the children that are here that they are being treated unfairly:

"Like one was mainly financial problems, that I have to sort out. Get more help. Because I have to provide for my son. And when you need to have some money to support people outside there, I had problems at home here with my children here." (Cambodian female, one to one, waiting)

"Yes, it effects them as they, because we have to budget our money so that we can provide some for my other son overseas. So the children here are feeling left out, or feeling jealous and hard done by. So we got a lot of quarrel in the family. It affects." (Cambodian female, one to one, waiting)

The respondent explained that this conflict and jealousy is detrimental to her mental health:

"A lot of arguments." (Cambodian female, one to one, waiting)

"Yes, in the family. And so that's been really a struggle for our family, in that way. Because I cannot tell anybody. I just keep that in my myself, and that's really, really affects me, affects my mental health." (Cambodian female, one to one, waiting)

5.3 CONSEQUENCES OF POOR HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Respondents reported that the stressors outlined above had frequently led them to experience a sense of hopelessness and failure; feeling stressed; negative emotions including low mood and anger; a wide range of negative thought patterns; being physically sick and unproductive; indecisiveness, concentration problems; tearfulness; and feelings of pressure and unrealistic demands being placed upon them.

5.3.1 Hopelessness and failure

In seven focus groups and nine one to one interviews feelings of hopelessness and failure were identified because of the struggles and difficulties encountered through the process of trying to reunite with family members.

“Sometimes I feel like giving up and just to go back because it’s hard not having your loved ones here enjoying life like I am.” (Focus Group 3)

“I not yet a senior social worker when I applied for my wife, that process took not that long the process took quickly, but I was worry and I was a lot of stress and failed some papers. And but I could not commit my study that I wanted, so it took my one year, so the second year I continued my education and I work to pay my study fees so I could not miss another year so that lost me two years.” (Focus Group 4)

5.3.2 Feeling Stressed

More than half of the focus group and one to one interview respondents reported immense stress as a result of the family reunification process. The manifestations of their stress included concentration problems and an inability to learn new tasks that would assist settlement, such as obtaining a drivers license. Stress was further reported to have impacted negatively on respondents’ physical health, as in the case of a respondent with diabetes who felt that his health was negatively affected by the stress.

“Getting stressed. Making us stress, making us not concentrating. I am still young but I forget things because of my stress. I am not going to learn to drive because of stress. Always thinking about family. Thinking and worries about family because it's not safe. In our culture, the family, they put a lot of pressure on the members that are here like in New Zealand. "You are safe there, you are fine there but you don't concern about us." This is what they think because this is what they are expecting, the families here that they can bring them here but they are not doing that. That makes the family more stressed. Pressure.” (Focus Group 12)

“When I arrived here I had diabetes. That really kept my life, my health up and down and I was alone, there was nobody. Of course my wife didn't join me and I expected at least 2 of my sons to be near me. That would give the family, the 2 sons of mine would really give me a break. A big support. But still we find now my wife be alone with one son, the other one is still young. I want to say I wish he had been here with me. Certain responsibilities that require me to handle at home there. We would join hands together and say what we do, your uncle needs this. We got some few things to do. We live together and that's how we work at home. But still now pressure is on me. I'm supposed to care for all other family members back so you can see the stress.

Quite a lot. How healthy can it be? I don't think it is health.” (Focus Group 10)

5.3.3 Negative emotions

Negative emotions including depression, anger, and fluctuating moods were identified in 10 of the 13 focus groups and 13 of the 15 one to one interviews as a consequence of the challenges of the family reunification process.

“The impact it had on me is also the same as what everyone else was experiencing, I was unhappy, my emotions were unpredictable and this effected my family because sometimes I would be angry and would take it out on them, I also had sick days off work.” (Focus Group 3)

“Having depression - is when we are not like having our family here. We make ourself like, close our door, not socialising with people, not talking with people.” (Focus Group 12)

5.3.4 Negative thoughts

Negative thought patterns, specifically worry and ruminating on the problems that families might be experiencing back home, or in refugee camps were frequently reported as continuing to contribute to ongoing poor health and wellbeing.

“The war in Somalia contributes because if they living Somalia with no war then you won't be worry but now there is war and you worry of what will happen your family.” (Focus Group 4)

“My health is not good; it is very bad since they declined my daughter. I am near to go mad, I paid a lot of money, a lot of time, I send bill or money.” (Focus Group 6)

5.3.5 Physically sick, lack of productivity

In addition to negative psychosocial consequences, negative physical consequences were reported as being associated with the period of waiting to hear the outcome of a application; of persevering with an application even when initially denied, or of hearing that one's application had been denied. Examples of physical consequences included being sick, being admitted to hospital, experiencing sleeping difficulties and having high blood pressure.

“I talk for me about my physical. I can't sleep all night.” (Focus Group 12)

One respondent specifically linked her high blood pressure to worrying all the time about the welfare of family members who were not with her in New Zealand.

“For her, getting her blood pressure rising all the time because of thinking all the time.” (Focus Group 11)

“Sometimes you will get even sick and you will go to the hospital, they will try to test the blood and do that, they will say that there's nothing wrong with you. But in your body you feel like you are sick. All the body is paining you. But the test - nothing. And they will start asking you, you have stress? And sometimes you are confused, you don't know that you are having but maybe it is then even.” (Focus Group 12)

During a period of tearfulness she went on to say:

“You will just sometimes sit inside by yourself. With no one to talk with and you will start talking by yourself or sometimes you will just start shedding tears without anything or somebody. If you have like a little baby there you will just start quarrelling with yourself... the thing in your mind is different but now you want to put it to... wrong with you.” (Focus Group 12)

5.3.6 Indecisiveness and concentration problems

Five focus groups and eight one to one interviewees highlighted indecisiveness and concentration problems stemming from the family reunification process.

“The separation is making all this disturbance in the mind, she's not settled. That is true for her. She is adding on, what really making her not settle is the number of things including that like, when relative died, all the long time that expect to be meeting them, but they didn't, that they died. This what also upsetting her so much. And then those she wanted to [be] together with them, they are not here with her, this one is also giving confusion, some days you don't get up from the bed and you are not so well and there is food, yes we eat, have the house that shelters us. But if you are separated into different places, this all make no meaning. You better to sleep hungry and stay together and hope that things will get meaning. This is not total wellbeing because to her she is missing some of the relatives, some of her family. Most of the family are not here. Better help them and have to sleep hungry... She prefers sleeping hungry and having substandard meals [and] so having everybody there.” (Focus Group 11)

5.3.7 Unrealistic expectations and pressure

Respondents further discussed the stress and negative impact on their health and wellbeing of pressure from family back home to support them financially, and to make attempts to reunify as soon as possible. They further reported how this negatively affected their ability to financially manage their own situation in New Zealand.

“If you are safe, and you are here safe now, because most of them got either a son or a daughter who is outside and the people will have the high expectation maybe because you are outside there and they try to help them they might try to ask you. They will say "We got our son there, even though maybe he is working, so he can support us." Like you find any relative can call you and like "Can you send me something?" or those kind of things. If you don't have, like for example when they ask for something small, you cannot send because of your financial situation here you are also struggling for your own. there's no work. And then if you are the benefit, the little benefit you get all goes for the rent and things like that. At the end of the week you have nothing left so you cannot support them. Now they will say maybe you've changed or maybe you don't want them anymore like maybe that love has gone out because you are far from them and things like that... For you that's not the case but for them that is the case so you become so stressed that you cannot get a job.” (Focus Group 13)

5.4 EFFECTS OF BEING SUCCESSFUL WITH THE FAMILY REUNIFICATION PROCESS

Of the focus group respondents who had been successful with their application to reunite with their family, the key response was one of happiness and relief.

5.4.1 Increased feelings of happiness, and decreased worrying

A decrease in worry was reported by 86% of ‘successful’ focus group respondents and by 11 of the 15 one to one interviews.

“When they (niece and nephew) came I was very happy. Instead of showing happiness I was crying, shedding tears. It's unbelievable. When they're here everything is so completely happy...Tension goes away. Relief.” (Focus Group 1)

“It was very difficult. Especially when you apply, they don't tell you if this is going to be successful or not, you know, the application. Also my mother wasn't in her country, she was in a completely foreign country. She was living with someone, strangers. I wasn't very well either and my health got even worse. And when she came? It was a huge difference. It was very, it was a great relief for me because when she came, I used to get very agitated, very angry, very nervous and stressed. But after she came I felt very, all these conditions were gone and I felt really much better and everything was normal so my whole being all relaxed.” (Focus Group 10)

“I used to live with my mum back home and because my 2 brothers were married and were not living with us. So when she came I felt very good. Very

happy with the children and the family and the mum is very happy with the children.” (Focus Group 10)

“Before my children came I was really sad and unhappy that I had not seen them in such a long time. When they came I was a little bit happy.” (Focus Group 10)

5.4.2 Improved economic/financial status

The majority of focus group respondents who had been successfully reunited with family reported improvements in their financial situation.

“Yeah the worry is decreased and economically you are getting better, and you will get time go holidays, sharing your family to be a happy.” (Focus Group 1)

5.4.3 Improved functioning in studies and work

An improved ability to work and/or focus on study and obtaining academic success was reported following a successful reunification.

“Before they approve my residence visa for my wife, I did not know if I can start B semester of the studying IT and everything, I was not sure I can taking off, because I was thinking too much of the process and all that stuff and all these things they asked you to make for them which is like challenging, I am glad I can start and continue my study because they approve now.” (Focus Group 4)

It was very, it was a great relief for me because when she [mother] came, I used to get very agitated, very angry, very nervous and stressed. But after she came I felt very, all these conditions were gone and I felt really much better and everything was normal so my whole being all relaxed. (Focus Group 13)

5.4.4 Negative impact on family dynamic and education attainment

While there appeared to be a number of positive outcomes as a result of being successfully reunited with family members, some family members did chose to share negative outcomes on the family dynamic, and on the education attainment for the young person/s reunited. In one case, a Laotian mother had arrived with her husband and two young children. After having been in New Zealand for a few years, the family applied to reunite with their two oldest children who had been left behind in Laos to live with the woman’s parents (their grandparents in a small village in the countryside). The woman was successful with her application, and the two boys arrived aged 10 and 11 years old. The Laotian mother described that while they were happy to be reunited, having two extra children in the household placed greater stress and burden on the financial resources to care for the family. In addition, because the two oldest children had grown up for at least 5 years separated from their parents, she found it challenging re-establishing a

bond with them, including trying to assert parental authority when they had come to recognise her mother (their grandmother) as the parental authority. There were also frequent conflict between the two younger children in the household with the reunited brothers in trying to reassert their roles and place in the family because the youngest siblings had very little memory of their oldest brother and while separated had already established their place and hierarchy within the family structure. The Laotian mother also reported that while the reunited children were given significant help with their learning from teachers and teacher aids in their early years, they continued to struggle within the education system at school, with both leaving school before sitting their University Entrance Examination. They struggled to find employment, with both currently employed in factory jobs. Both children were also reported to have spent time in prison on separate occasions for various offences. The mother reported feelings of guilt and shame for how the life had turned out for her two reunited sons. She indicated that she had had thoughts of whether it would have been best to leave them in Laos where they had strong emotional bonds with her parents, and perhaps where they would have done better in their schooling as they had appeared to struggle so much with learning in New Zealand.

In another case, a Columbian grandmother talked about her difficulties in managing the wide range of developmental needs and family dynamics following the reunification of her two granddaughters with her family last year. The grandmother had arrived in New Zealand in 2010 with three children and one grandson. The grandson's two sisters were still living in Ecuador, his mother (her daughter) had been brutally murdered by drug lords and the boys' father was unknown. The family had become separated because of the danger in Columbia. The grandmother applied to be reunited with her two granddaughters, and early 2011, were reunited. The grandmother reported that it has been hard caring for her three children and three grandchildren because of the lack of other family support in New Zealand. Furthermore, she stated that her oldest son has significant mental health problems and is under a mental health service. With the addition of the two young girls aged 14 and 16 to the household, she has found it increasingly stressful trying to keep the grandchildren and her other children safe when her oldest son becomes physically and verbally violent. She further talked about the difficulties in raising three teenage girls (including her daughter who is 15 years old) who she reports desires more freedom, and independence to socialise, and participate in activities that she has limited to no funds for them to participate in. As a result, she experiences low mood, worry and tearfulness about how she will continue to care for such a big family.

5.5 EFFECTS OF BEING UNSUCCESSFUL WITH THE FAMILY REUNIFICATION APPLICATION.

When informed that their application had been declined or initially declined, respondents reported a number of negative physical, psychological and social effects.

5.5.1 Psychological consequences

Negative psychological effects included depression, stress, powerlessness, concentration difficulties, tearfulness, memory difficulties, constant worry and rumination about the family left behind. Additionally, pressure from family back home appeared to maintain and reinforce the feelings of stress.

“Depression. Not bringing your family and you've put a lot of time into it then they say no and you feel depressed and very sad.” (Focus Group 9)

“Having depression - is when we are not like having our family here. We make our self like, close our door, not socialising with people, not talking with people.” (Focus Group 12)

“Sometimes I would get very frustrated and feel powerless so it had a very bad impact on my health.” (Focus Group 2)

“Getting stressed. Making us stress, making us not concentrating. I am still young but I forget things because of my stress. I am not going to learn to drive because of stress. Always thinking about family. Thinking and worries about family because it's not safe. In our culture, the family, they put a lot of pressure on the members that are here like in NZ. “You are safe there, you are fine there but you don't concern about us.” This is what they think because this is what they are expecting, the families here that they can bring them here but they are not doing that. That makes the family more stressed. Pressure.” (Focus Group 12)

An added burden was respondents' attempts to maintain an appearance of “being ok”, in order to protect their children. This resulted in feelings of additional pressure.

“I felt emotional, sad and had to hide these emotions from my children, it was an ongoing pressure really, so at the time my health was not so good as a result.” (Focus Group 2)

“It affected my whole life, I became sick and I until now I am very sick and I decided that I will never apply family reunification again for my other families.” (Focus Group 2)

Feelings of hopelessness, and inadequacy were also reported as outcomes of being unable to successfully reunite with family members.

I think people become a bit lonely because they can't do anything. Loneliness really affects people's wellbeing, you can't go out because you don't feel very

happy. If your family is back home and they are suffering and you're suffering because you can't do anything to speed up the process. People in the community became depressed and were diagnosed with depression. They can't do anything, they think they need to go back. It's quite hard, it affects their whole lifestyle. (Focus Group 9)

Two focus group and four one to one respondents reported feelings of dissociation and detachment; that there was something wrong with them, and being unable to relate to where they were and what they were doing.

"I like mad person, I don't where I am sometimes." (Focus Group 6)

"If you missing your family members and they are suffering, you wont sleep well and your health will not fit or you can't sleep well. You can only be happy and get only little get better when your family arrives." (Focus Group 6)

A respondent in focus group 3 discussed how stressed she had become, and how she had required counselling for sleeping problems, as a result of difficulties related to the family reunification process.

"I felt very stressed due to the family reunification process and as result I required counseling because I wasn't able to sleep most nights. The counseling helped quite a lot." (Focus Group 3)

A respondent waiting to hear the outcome of his application discussed his difficulties in being present and available to function and to engage in his present environment because his thoughts are with the process.

"I don't have time to integrate New Zealand well and I can't work as well because this madness of the process. I don't know the situation my children in here, I don't spend time with my children because me thinking the process." (Focus Group 6)

5.5.2 Physical health complications

Physical health complications, such as high blood pressure, asthma and diabetes were reported to be either directly attributable to or affected by the process. Sleeping difficulties were reported not only by respondents who had been unsuccessful with their applications, but also by respondents waiting to hear the outcome of their application.

"I have blood pressure, I am sick because of the long process and getting bad news every time... because of that, that is how it starts. I could be only happy if I reunite with my family but If I am not reunite than I suffer a lot." (Focus Group 6)

"I have diabetes, because of the process, it creates problems." (Focus Group 6)

Somatisation is defined as a tendency to experience and communicate somatic or physical distress in response to psychosocial stress. All of the five Columbian one to one respondents reported physical health complaints related to the distress of being unsuccessful in their application to reunite with their family. These included physical aches in the heart, sore and tense limbs, and generally feeling physically unwell with no identifiable medical cause found by their GP or medical practitioners.

“Sometimes you will get even sick and you will go to the hospital, they will try to test the blood and do that, they will say that there's nothing wrong with you. But in your body you feel like you are sick. All the body is painning you. But the test - nothing. And they will start asking you, you have stress? And sometimes you are confused, you don't know that you are having but maybe it is then even.” (Focus Group 12)

5.5.3 Social consequences

Respondents who had been unsuccessful with their applications frequently reported experiencing ongoing struggles to settle and feelings of loneliness because of being unable to reunite. They further reported that this contributed to their feelings of isolation.

“No one knows me better than somebody we grow with or somebody in the same family... You feel so lonely. You can't settle because a part is missing. You are not really whole.” (Focus Group 12)

One respondent reported that he had failed to inform Immigration New Zealand that he was married because he feared that his application might be declined. In his attempts to reunite with his wife, his application was declined. Consequently, this husband and wife are unable to reunite under the family reunification provisions.

“The immigration it is place that makes your life very miserable and it gives you very hard life. Before I came to New Zealand I was married but I did not tell New Zealand immigration that I was married man then when I arrived I told them because at that time I was fear that will not allow me not to come here. Now when I told them and the process was going well and I did everything in many years, they declined it, it is not just fair.” (Focus Group 6)

5.5.4 Effects of being unsuccessful with the application process on the family

Not only are individuals applying to reunite with family negatively affected when their application is unsuccessful. This situation also negatively impacts on the family members with whom they are trying to reunite.

Throughout the application process, one respondent reported that both he and his family felt happy and positive that the family would be able to reunite. However on being declined, the respondent reported that his family became depressed and unhappy.

“My family were happy and I was happy too because I thought that we will reunite each other but then I told them that they have been declined, they became depressing and unhappy.” (Focus Group 6)

Other respondents discussed feelings of anger and stress that their family members experienced when the application was unsuccessful.

“Even though the process was very unfair but then even worst when you been given decline you became heartbreaking as well as my family. They became very depressing. Some of them became angry and stress full.” (Focus Group 6)

“Before they were happy but when you tell them the decline news they become very stressful and you feel the same.” (Focus Group 6)

“When I told them the bad news their morale became very low. It is very hard situation. Some of them became very mad because of this.” (Focus Group 6)

Others respondents described negative attitude shifts towards them from their family members with whom they were unable to reunite. They reported being accused of lying or of not having put enough effort into the application process.

“My family said that I am liar; and the whole process was not true.” (Focus Group 6)

CHAPTER SIX

UNDERSTANDING AND PERCEPTIONS OF THE FAMILY REUNIFICATION PROCESS

The understanding and perceptions that an individual or family has before embarking on the process of applying to reunite with family members is likely to affect how they perceive their experiences and cope with obstacles encountered.

6.1 UNDERSTANDING AND PERCEPTIONS OF THE FAMILY REUNIFICATION PROCESS

Respondents reported a wide and diverse range of understanding and perceptions of the family reunification process, as illustrated below:

6.1.1 Process will run smoothly if everything is correct

Although the process might take longer than desired, it would run smoothly and result in a positive outcome, as long as the information presented to the INZ was complete and correct.

“We were told that the process would take time but would run smoothly if everything is correct.” (Focus Group 3)

6.1.2 Waste of time and money

being discouraged from making attempts to reunify with their family because they would likely achieve a negative outcome that included time and financial cost.

“I was told that I was wasting my time and money and that I would not get anything.” (Focus Group 3)

6.1.3 Discrimination

Respondents in three focus groups reported a belief that particular countries or ethnicities would be discriminated against and possibly treated unfairly by INZ.

“Coming from Middle Eastern country I was told my country is hot listed and that it is not easy to bring my family here.” (Focus Group 3)

“I was told that some case managers aren’t professional and don’t look at things case by case, but they rather base their decision on your background, for example if they know that you are Somali and that you are trying to bring your spouse to New Zealand, they would immediately think that it’s a lie and that you are trying to bring someone you are related to or someone who paid money to you. Some Somalis may have done this, but it doesn’t give the case managers a reason to stereotype all Somalis.” (Focus Group 2)

6.1.4 The process is hard, difficult, and does not always give the outcome desired

In more than half of the 13 focus groups and 11 of the 15 one to one interviews, respondents reported having been informed that the process of applying would be hard, challenging, and random in terms of who would be successful.

“I was told it is hard to get reunited with my family and that I should be prepared for the worst.” (Focus Group 3)

“I was told family reunification process is like playing poker you might win or you might lose it is never what is seems.” (Focus Group 3)

“I was told it would be problematic and lengthy.” (Focus Group 2)

“I was told that even though everything may be correct, there is always a chance that it would be declined.” (Focus Group 2)

Despite that, others were also encouraged to keep the faith that they would one day succeed in reuniting with their family.

"I was told that the system is hard but to have faith because I would be reunified with my family." (Focus Group 2)

6.1.5 Application would be quick successful if it's for a spouse or children

A significant number of respondents believed that if the application related to spouse or children, this would hasten the process.

"I was told that if spouse and children are separated that the process would be quick but that doesn't seem to be the case." (Focus Group 1)

6.1.6 That DNA is required

Some respondents discussed uncertainty as to when and why DNA might be required. They further discussed their concerns about how this would be completed, possible corruption in the process and concerns about who would have access to the data and where it would be stored.

"I heard that sometimes there may be DNA testing required." (Focus Group 1)

6.1.7 Unhelpful communication about the family reunification application

In the following quote, the respondent reported having been informed that if she listed all the members in her family prior to being resettled she would be able to reunite with the family members listed. However, she reported that she had subsequently found that only the children would be allowed to reunite with her.

"When immigration went to Syria, where she was, they told her to put the name of all of the important members, her brother, sisters and her parents. When they reached NZ and in the process with them she call them (her family) and said 'I'm already going away and when I'm there I will call you'. Brothers and sisters already raised their hopes. 'In New Zealand, when she reach there she is going to call us and we all be following her.' Now when she reached here, big change. Nothing and nobody is allowed to come except the children." (Focus Group 10)

Other respondents discussed their knowledge about who would be able to be applied for, and those who were not eligible under INZ's definition of family.

“We do know that you can bring your kids, or your mother and father, husband and wife. And if I want my mother to come, we are aware that we are allowed to do that, we are allowed to bring children and but not a brother who is under certain age or over a certain age. And also if he, the brother or siblings have any family themselves then they are not allowed. That's what we did understand.” (Focus Group 10)

6.1.8 No knowledge

Respondents in four focus groups and seven one to one interviews talked about a total lack of knowledge of the family reunification process in New Zealand.

“First I did not know how to apply, I did not anything, so when applied they said I can apply for Visa for family reunifications, and I did not have enough money to apply it...while I was thinking that I, the immigration act or law has changed and they said you can't apply reunification category, you need to apply for family under reunification process and I applying for up to 3 years, so the third year I won.” (Focus Group 5)

“For us, at that time, we had been told, they didn't say anything about bringing members of our family here. They just say you will be in a safe place, you will get benefit, you will be fine in the new place.” (Focus Group 13)

6.2 EXPECTATION OF THE FAMILY REUNIFICATION PROCESS

Ninety percent of respondents reported having an expectation, prior to lodging their application for family reunification, that the process would be “easy”, “fast” and “painless.”

6.2.1 To be reunited with family member

Respondents in all focus groups and one-to-one interviews reported that they had hoped or expected to be reunited with their family.

“My expectation was that it was the New Zealand Government's job to bring my family here.”

“My expectation was I would see my family within 6 months.” (Focus Group 1)

“I was happy just to know that such process existed because no matter how long it took or how hard it seemed there was always hope that we would be reunified.” (Focus Group 1)

“I married just before I came to New Zealand and I thought my wife would join me soon after I came here, may be after few months but that didn’t happen.” (Focus Group 2)

“For me I was expecting that they will allow and bring my husband the way I told them but it did not happen” (Focus Group 5)

“I did not know anything, but I was expecting when I came to New Zealand that I will reunite my other members but that did not happen.” (Focus Group 6)

“We knew everything, they (immigration) told the process but I was expecting that will not decline. I was expecting that it not turn this way, I thought it was easy and stress less but now it is very hard and painful.” (Focus Group 8)

“Easy. Easy way that my family would, that would come and join with me. And when you mean family, what was in your mind? How big was that family? A reasonable number. More specific - brothers, children, fathers, which ones? We think of younger ones. Still unmarried. Those are the ones we really thought of so that they can come and work here and have a life here. Changing their life here. They would come, working hard and giving back, supporting other family members.” (Focus Group 10)

When I came my expectation is, I was expecting that I can bring as many people as I want to NZ. And I thought that it easy to bring them but when I try it was really very hard. (Focus Group 12)

6.2.2 Fast and easy

The majority of focus group discussions and one to one interviews indicated that respondents believed the family reunification process would be fast and easy. Some expected to be reunited with family members within a year. Other’s expected a shorter period in between receiving communication from the Department of Immigration about their application.

“I was expecting it to be immediate when you apply. For it not to take long before my family can come. How soon? I applied this year. I expect my family to come within the year.” (Focus Group 9)

“The process would take reasonably sooner.” (Focus Group 4)

“I thought it will take two months.” (Focus Group 4)

“My expectation was very different to what I am going through, I thought it was easy. I would reunite with my family and would live a happy life here in New Zealand where I now call home.” (Focus Group 3)

"I thought it was very easy process and that it doesn't take long." (Focus Group 3)

"I thought it would be fast and easy." (Focus Group 1)

"My expectation is very of all, it is very important to get the correspondents, to get the answer, to get email from the immigration when you apply and send the forms is taking too long time, if I send for example another letter a company today with in 14 days I get answer but New Zealand immigration, they find out they got information but sometimes it takes 2 months or 3 months to say hey we get your application and we processing, my position it is very important to get the correspondents, to get emails, to get feedback and secondly it is takes more than 3 months to get the information, the sender, the receiver, not more than 3 months and also my expectation the NZ immigration they must know our culture, and our what believe our family." (Focus Group 4)

"Time for family to arrive between 6 months and one year." (Focus Group 9)

6.2.3 Straightforward and simple

A key identified through both focus group and one to one interview. was that respondents expected the process to be easy and straightforward.

"My expectation was documentation demands would be easier than it is." (Focus Group 1)

"I expected the paperwork would be a little less than it is." (Focus Group 1)

"I thought it would be simple." (Focus Group 2)

"I thought it was a quick process and not much hassle." (Focus Group 2)

"I was expecting it to be painless process and that I would be reunited with my family as soon as I submitted the application, but that is not how it went." (Focus Group 3)

"If I'm applying to bring my husband or my dad or my mum it should be 3 months because sometimes if you're applying for your immediate family members and you know that you left them behind and you know they don't have any support you're expecting that they should come fast. I find that some people apply for their children to come because their family is so extended and you get only may six or seven will come and the other kids will be left behind by themselves. As a mum here in NZ I would expect that those children would be here within 3 months because they haven't got anyone." (Focus Group 9)

“They (immigration) ask a lot of information that you cannot get [them] at the time. I did not expect this extra information.” (Focus Group 9)

6.2.4 INZ assistance would be easily accessible

Seven one to one respondents were very vocal about their expectation that access to INZ staff and assistance would be easily accessible. This was identified in nearly half of the focus groups.

“I was expecting that there would be only one office in New Zealand where people like me can be referred to, for example when I spoke to immigrations they referred me to Canberra in Australia because they said my case cannot be lodged from here in NZ. When I spoke to Canberra they referred me to the U.N in Sudan. So it would be better there would be one office in NZ where all these agencies can come together and help us.” (Focus Group 1)

“I expected that I would have an easy communication with immigrations.” (Focus Group 2)

6.2.5 Supporting agencies/persons available to assist with the application

“I expected that there would be agencies who would advocate for me regarding the application to make the process easier for people who may not know the rules and regulations.” (Focus Group 2)

6.3 EXPERIENCE OF THE FAMILY REUNIFICATION PROCESS

Respondents reported a wide gap between their prior knowledge and expectations and actual experiences of the family reunification process.

6.3.1 Long journey

Respondents in all focus groups and one-to-one interviews reported an extended waiting period between lodging their family reunification application and being informed of the outcome.

“Also too much waiting. They say “we got your application and we got a lot of people to wait.” You have to wait. You keep on waiting, there's no reason.” (Focus Group 12)

"Waiting is too long. One of our lady in the community, when they finished their process with the husband. Instead for the NZ to bring them here, then they were wait for a long time. Then husband have to died in Africa then they brought just the lady alone. They brought the lady with the children, she stays here in Lower Hutt. So the waiting is too...If they want to bring somebody, when it is successful let them bring and if there is nothing, if they are not going to bring someone let them say strongly to the person who is waiting, "You are not successful. we are not going to take you [them?]." So that person should be aware. You will also, should have that "I am now here, I am confident to stay by myself." (Focus Group 12)

"I was waiting Immigration to answer me or allow my husband for 7 years. Everything is legal, we follow all the requirements but they never understand, we passed interview, even worst they take blood test for DNA and we match the DNA same, they hold the DNA." (Focus Group 5)

"The process took long." (Focus Group 4)

"It took 3 years from the time I applied for my family to come." (Focus Group 9)

"It took longer than I hoped for." (Focus Group 1)

"Our family back home complains a lot because the process never seems to end." (Focus Group 1)

"I was trying to bring my nephew who was in a refugee camp and while he was waiting for the New Zealand process, he got interviewed by America and was resettled in America. I guess it's always the long period of waits that causes people to look into other alternatives." (Focus Group 2)

"I was trying to bring my siblings to New Zealand but after waiting for an answer for 3-4 years they declined saying that they had to be in a refugee camp in order for them to come to New Zealand." (Focus Group 2)

"Having no family here means that the process should be faster and I was told that my application has been accepted, since then (2007) up to now there is no answer all they say to me is that it is in the process." (Focus Group 3)

An Afghani female respondent, now reunited with her extended family, described the process from her perspective. At one point, she reported, the length of time taken to process her application resulted in her having to wait for a policy change before becoming eligible to bring her family to New Zealand.

"24 when I moved there. And when I came to New Zealand. And it's the lack of their immigration department, how they work, it's too slow. Even I took to immigration person who was in charge of immigration, I talked to them, why

it's taking too long, because they said because of the staff they have, it's not enough staff. And too many applications. They can't process it. So by that one, I lost 1 year here. Which is now I am 25. And I am not entitled to that.” (Afghani female, one to one, Successful)

“So it's over 24, I believe so, over 24 to what they explain to us. Over 24, you can't bring your family, because you are independent and you are sort of like mature and you don't need anyone to be with you. So sort of that kind of policy that they have. So yeah, it comes to that point, and I applied and nothing.” (Afghani female, one to one, Successful)

This respondent discussed her perceptions of the slowness of allocating a case manager and how, even when a case manager was allocated, he seemed incapable of performing his duties:

“Finally they find a case manager for me. And when they find a case manager, I have no idea if this guy was very busy, or he had no clue what he is doing.” (Afghani female, one to one, Successful)

“Yeah, how you are going to connect people, or how you are going to talk. How are you going to write. So that's how I connect these guys. And then in sometimes even the case manager ignoring at all. Ignored the lawyer, ignored me, and I wrote to their manager. The case managers manager. And I even met her here as well. I said to her, I said what's going on? I have no clue. This is taking so long. I mean, for god's sake if you need information, this is the information. If you don't need the information, why is this not working?” (Afghani female, one to one, Successful)

The respondent reported repeatedly following up, calling and pushing for her case to be attended to. She went as far as talking to members of parliament for help:

“So I talked to lots of MP's as well. I talked to lots of MP's and asked the MP's if they can act in something like a sort of like a talk to the immigration minister. Or something like that. And if they can push them to make these people work faster. Or actually do something on this. And by pushing some of the ministers as well, that's why this case is not going faster at all.” (Afghani female, one to one, Successful)

The respondent considered that the lack of action on her case was negligent and that the case manager was not taking his role seriously. Due to the seriousness of her family's circumstances the respondent felt that the case manager was carelessly dealing with people's lives and not appreciating the severity of the consequences of his inaction:

“At the end of the day you wonder how you go home, because it's just your basic life. But actually behind the scenes, you are playing with people's lives. Because people are really, really in danger. They are kind of like suffering

every day. And so I was sort of like feeling like this guy is just thinking yeah, I will just do a job. That's okay.” (Afghani female, one to one, Successful)

The respondent further highlighted the stress that she suffered:

“It was painful, because you have to wait for a long time. You have no idea will they going to accept that, or not. So sort of like keep you in the room, lock you in the door, and you don't know when you will be free. Just like that. It's a freedom. Sort of when you are thinking about something, you are under pressure all the time. So you will be mentally and emotionally, everything will be under pressure. because one is suffering. Sleep 3 hours a day. And those people come and say, I am too tired. I said, you just wake up my friend. How come you are tired? He says oh, well yeah. And like the 2 years 3 years I studied, none of them knew that I worked during the night. At the end of the day, I don't know what happened, I said oh I worked all night.” (Afghani female, one to one, Successful)

6.3.2 Very difficult and lengthy process with much uncertainty

The reported short time frame allowed to complete certain aspects of the application, such as obtaining a medical assessment meant that families were sometimes required to go through the process of applying again.

“We went back and forth with the required documentations.” (Focus Group 1)

“They say when something expire, re do it and finally they decline your application.” (Focus Group 6)

Repeated attempts to meet all the demands of the application were still unsuccessful.

“I apply to bring my niece. She doesn't have parents and the application declined. Told me I am not eligible to bring her here. She is an orphan with no parents? Yes. I apply to bring my partner and they said he get the identification form because he is a refugee in Kenya. And I said to them it is hard to get identification. And they told me if he can't get identification the application can declined he tried to get identification and I said to them [got identification] and they still declined his application. ... He got identification But they still declined?” (Focus Group 12)

When asked about the reunification process, a male Myanmar respondent, who had been successfully reunited, explained in detail his perceptions of the complexity of the family reunification process. A ballot system had initially been undertaken. Upon being successful in the ballot the respondent had thought that the move would happen. However, this, he notes, was only the beginning of the process:

“In the application I saw that there would be a ballot. There might be a negative result from that. So there is. And I am not sure the timeframe...About after about 8 months, I received a letter from Immigration New Zealand saying that congratulations. My brothers application was selected. And he can start or I can start resident application for him. So and at that time I think, oh, finally. I have done...Actually that was kind of the start.” (Myanmar, male, one to one, successful)

Following his success in the ballot, tests were required to prove that the respondent and his brother were in fact related. The respondent was also required to pay significant costs and to undertake extensive paperwork to complete the process.

“There was many meetings, communication over the phone, text, emails between my volunteer lawyer and me and Community Law CentreWe don't, we never have some of those documents, like birth certificate and stuff like that...And when we have a look at the application form, there are many things to submit. So even finding out which document is needed takes quite a while to work out with my volunteer lawyer and me. And then after that, after we have a look at the application from, for at least I think 4 or 5 times. We clearly know that he has to start applying his passport in Myanmar... They can't afford themselves for the application fee to get the passport. So I have to find a job and save some money for us. And he has to go back at least two trips to get his passport, because when he submit[ted] the application for the passport, he can't just stay at the capital city. It costs a lot and he has to wait at least about one and a half months.Only to get his passport even takes quite a long process.” (Myanmar, male, one to one, successful)

“Yes. We have to show our relationship. Whether he is my brother or not, I suppose. So I think it is about we have, in Myanmar we have a document from the government the list of the family members. And we have to translate it to, I ask him to bring it to the capital city. And then do it at that notary, translate it and then to send it here. And then I show my lawyer if it is kind of acceptable document, and when he show a green light then, yeah. One after another document.” (Myanmar, male, one to one, successful)

The process of obtaining necessary documentation required the respondent to send papers to India so that his brother could cross the border to retrieve them from a family member there:

“And I post it to one of my brothers who live in the border city in India. And I post it to him. ..., then I will send them some more money to go to New Delhi. And they will collect the passport.” (Myanmar, male, one to one, successful)

6.3.3 Financially costly

The financial cost of the application process, irrespective of whether or not the application was successful, was a significant theme across the focus groups and one to one interviews.

“Very long time, I was just waiting what I can do, I hired a lawyer, he takes \$ 200 an hour, when I got the lawyer It took only 5 months for finalize but he has to go through medical check again. The medical check expires every 3 months and you have to re do it again, so waste a lot of money because of immigration. Also police screening check certificate expires every six months. Same you have to do it again and it costs money. And my husband lived Kenya, Kenya is not Somalia, getting documents you want takes too long.” (Focus Group 5)

“I have paid money to Immigration advisor and told her that my family is listed with UN and the UN protects them, I have asked her to help me find any way I could reunited with my sister. She has told me the only door that is open for me is to keep writing letters to the UN so that they would be part of the Refugee Quota. We are not getting any answers from the UN and no one else is helping me I do not know where to turn for help.” (Focus Group 3)

“I spent almost 4000 Or 5000 dollars for the application before they said we declined your application.” (Focus Group 6)

“Sometimes they say that the docs expired therefore to renew it which is very painful and financially costly for us.” (Focus Group 1)

“It costs a lot of money to get things done. Did not understand that people must spend a lot of money. They ask you to get something this time then they ask you to get other things. They don't give you all the information at one time.” (Focus Group 9)

“They take a list of the family left behind and if, after she has come here she applies for a family to bring her family and [if] they say no then she has to apply for visas. Then she can't apply for reunification so she has to pay a lot of fees, each one is \$1200 for just medical application.” (Focus Group 9)

6.3.4 Poor communication and understanding

Poor or no communication from INZ was reported as a common concern.

“I received no answer for a long period of time.” (Focus Group 1)

“My expectation is very of all, it is very important to get the correspondents, to get the answer, to get email from the immigration when you apply and send the forms is taking too long time. If I send for example another letter a company today within 14 days I get answer but New Zealand immigration, they find out they got information but sometimes it takes 2 months or 3 months to say hey we get your application and we processing. My position it is very important to get the correspondents, to get emails, to get feedback and secondly it is takes more than 3 months to get the information.” (Focus Group 4)

“I was told that my application has to be on a waiting list for four months, and then they will allocate it with a case manager. It is now more than five years and nothing is still happening no one is even contacting me.” (Focus Group 3)

“For me in 2007 I apply for my mother in law and the other children so that was just quiet and we do not know I was not aware... so nothing was done. And another one [reason], I apply first for my mother in law because they were in refugee camp because when we came they told us that they will process those who are those being assisted by the UN. So other family are not in refugee camp they are just .. you know, when when you run sometime you get where to settle among the people then you will just settle there, they are not refugees. But when you are getting the form. They want those who are registered by the UN, they were staying in refugee camp so I decided to apply for my mother in law and other children. So are nothing, no response... They did not say even no. .. if it is quiet there is nothing you can do about it. No response so the family decided to go back in Sudan. Those who are not in the camps, there is nothing.” (Focus Group 12)

Lack of English language proficiency meant that an interpreter was frequently required to support the process.

“I don't know English and I can't speak my language because they will not understand my language and you need some one to interpreter for you like your kids, and kids have to school and when come from school and weekends everywhere is closed, I been through a lot.” (Focus group 5)

6.3.5 Lack of understanding of information requirement

Respondents in nine focus groups reported that having gone through the process, they were keenly aware of a lack of knowledge and information. Had they been better informed at the outset, they acknowledged that their application could have been better supported and the process could have been smoother.

“They (immigration) ask a lot of information that you cannot get [them] at the time. I did not expect this extra information.” (Focus Group 9)

“The thing is, the information about immigration, it is got so much now and they are not seeing the result and this is all affecting. But if at the end of it then nothing happened and they didn't hear any changes then nothing happened and all this has added to their stress.” (Focus Group 11)

“I was asked to apply then after I applied they said to me some questions that I should answer about the children, my niece and nephew. Question was how could I prove that those children were of my late brother? I told them that before my brother died he left a will that I should look after the children. So I have been looking after the children before I came [here]...I told them if they wanted more then DNA could prove it.” (Focus Group 9)

6.3.6 Changes in INZ personnel lengthens the process

Unexpected changes in INZ personnel during the processing of a family reunification application was reported as something that hindered the application process.

“I wanted my husband to join me in New Zealand, I was waiting for it for about 2 years when a new case manager took over from the previous one I was dealing with. The new case manager demanded that I hand in new documentation if I wanted to continue with the application and so I had to re do it again.” (Focus Group 2)

6.3.7 Family conflict

Family disharmony stemming from the time taken to process a family reunification application.

“What actually happened was that it took too long for them to process my wife's documentations and therefore my wife was pressuring me and was saying that I was the cause that it was taking long but in actual fact I was powerless to do anything about it. At the end we had to get a divorce due to us being separated for a long time.” (Focus Group 2)

6.3.8 Additional family separation

Due to only being able to apply for a set number of family members to reunite with, some families ended up being separated further as other family members were eventually resettled in other countries.

“It took 3 years from the time I applied for my family to come. I applied for 10 people but was only given the chance for 7 people. So I had to cut 3 off the list, personally. The other three that were left in the refugee camp, they went

to other countries because I couldn't get them here. I could not apply again.”
(Focus Group 9)

6.4 REALITY GAP BETWEEN EXPECTATION AND EXPERIENCE

The challenge of what was expected with regards to the process, versus actual experiences and the impact on a person's health and wellbeing was illustrated by the following case. A Cambodian female respondent who was waiting to reunite with her son reported that the obstacles preventing her reuniting with her son, particularly the DNA test, were negatively affecting her mental health. She explained that she expected to be able to bring her son with her. However, she ran into unexpected problems, specifically the challenge that her DNA test was false, and that she was not in fact the biological mother:

“My expectation is that I have, I succeeded in bringing my son here. So but when the application goes through, went through, everything got complicated. That they asked for DNA, and it does not match properly. And we had to go back. We had to do a lot of reapplying. And that makes me really worried, and it affects my health. Sometimes I felt that I did not want to live.”
(Cambodian female, one to one, waiting)

One is that they ask for DNA sample. And then it did not match. And they said that he is not my son. (Cambodian female, one to one, waiting)

The respondent considered that issues associated with the family reunification process caused her health problems, resulting in her being hospitalised:

“When they said things like the DNA was not matching, and I got sick. I was hospitalised.” (Cambodian female, one-to-one)

The respondent felt that a simplification of the processes could have helped her:

“And when they did the DNA test, and they didn't match and all of the problems, it affects me. Because my case is to try to bring my son here. But if there is anything that could facilitate or make it easier, or even if there is some problem, in that way it would help.” (Cambodian female, one to one, waiting)

6.5 RESPONDENTS' RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING THE FAMILY REUNIFICATION PROCESS

Respondents made a number of wide ranging suggestions as to how the current family reunification process could be improved. Specifically, they emphasised a need for INZ to provide better information and transparency about how long the process would take, including the effort and time required. A review of the family reunification policy including required documentation was strongly recommended. Respondents also considered that definitions of family relationships and of eligibility under the policy needed to be reviewed and clarified.

“I would say New Zealand must respect all the people, we are NZ citizen now, we have rights and send strong voices to NZ government and New Zealand immigration to say we need a good policy of family reunification, it is much harder now.” (Focus Group 4)

6.5.1 Pre and post settlement education about family reunification

Fifty-four percent of focus group respondents recommended that INZ should better inform family reunification applicants and their families about how challenging the process of trying to reunite with family members can be. Specifically, it was recommended that applicants should be officially advised that the current process is “hard and long.” This is illustrated in the following quotes:

“Make it known that this process is hard and long, people should be prepared for and told about it before hand because majority of us think that all is simple and that we have nothing to prove.” (Focus Group 3)

6.5.2 Process simplified, quicker response time and improved communication

Regardless of whether or not they were successful with their applications, the majority of respondents considered that official communication needed to be improved and that waiting periods needed to be significantly reduced.

“The main thing I would like to say about is that the wait period should be a bit shorter than it is.” (Focus Group 1)

“I would like to say, review the whole process because right now there is a big room for improvement whether it would be the wait time, the requirements, constraints on the families in terms of their health and wellbeing.” (Focus Group 1)

Response time needs to be quicker with consideration of how a prolonged response time may adversely affect the applicant’s psychosocial health and functioning.

“Our family is really important to us and to whoever is sending out this questionnaire and is asking us about our families should know they have families as well. If you ask for family members to come it should be within a timeframe. If they put a timeframe they should have it, so we don't get stressed. If we ask it means we want help. If they don't respond it's a bit hard.” (Focus Group 9)

Having a former refugee as part of INZ's team during the assessment of who would be best suited to resettle in New Zealand so they can explain more clearly some of the challenges faced, specifically, those associated with the family reunification process.

“If New Zealand immigration is going to bring someone from somewhere. If there is a possibility like that someone who is from here refugee background who came from that place and knows the place very well and knows the situation very well. If they can go together to where the interviews is maybe going to take place. Then that person can be of most benefit to those who are going to come because he has been here he knows what is the requirement when he goes there and he can speak to those who are coming.” (Focus Group 13)

6.5.3 To make the procedure of applying easier and less complicated

It was strongly recommended that access to advice and support with regards to lodging family reunification applications should be more readily available at the local level.

“To make it easy for us. I tried in 1998 to bring my parents here and I applied for them. I was at that time very sick, depressed and divorced with two children, single mother. I was in a very hard situation. I tried to get my mother father here to support me but their application been declined and father passed away then I tried just to get my mum here and also her application was declined as well and she passed away. Just to make easy the procedure of applying for our people for our relative, family members of first degree.” (Focus Group 12)

“The process of like bringing your family should be easy in a sense that like the many immigration offices in Auckland, fine like here in Wellington then it is a very far distance to communicate over there and find out the follow things. I was saying here if they can have a branch of like immigration or whatever they do in Mangere in other areas for the refugees who are in that area to have access to it and then it would make it a bit easier.” (Focus Group 13)

“I would say that there should be more communication from the immigration side to the applicants, as I found often they take a long time to reply.” (Focus Group 1)

6.5.4 Clearer and more logical rules and guidelines

Clearer rules and guidelines including greater official awareness and appreciation of difficulties in obtaining documents required.

“I would just like to know how immigration can ask refugees with no home to return to, to bring documents from back home, this is the single most hardest thing about the process is when you are told to bring this and that and we don't know how or where to obtain it from.” (Focus Group 3)

“I think those things they have rules, the regulations the criteria from immigration like setting it or someone to come in and then those rules it's good if the refugees should know. Like if they had a rule like if you wanted to bring your father your mother your child whatever and then if the rule says like you can be able to bring your father based on certain conditions, if there was any it is good if it can be explained to all the refugees so that they should real understand the...time they will be lodging the application for bringing someone and that means knows the rules over there but if they don't know... By doing so I think to make it pretty easy if they are applying I understood the rules and then I know at the end of the day and then my person other will be successful because it is under the rules or maybe outside of the rules.” (Focus Group 13)

“They should try to make it easy for someone to access, easier for someone to explain what it means.” (Focus Group 13)

“If you apply privately then you have to meet the cost of bringing your family into here, for example the air tickets, maybe medicals and then if that relative you brought here and then it has to either you have to support that person for a period of time, two years or something, before he can get support either from the government. So and then our living standard when you are not working you don't have other things to do. That makes it hard really, you can't do anything.” (Focus Group 13)

6.5.5 Easily understood and easy-to-navigate website

Most of the information they do put on the website and then if someone doesn't know how to get there, that's another problem. In the website they put all maybe some of those thing but if you don't know how to get there and to get those informations and maybe... but sometimes you cannot understand what that statement means. But if they should know where you can go and talk

to someone like we are sitting now talking to you and then help someone understand... you cannot understand really fully.”(Focus Group 13)

6.5.6 Increased cultural awareness and sensitivity regarding different definitions of family

When given the opportunity to speak freely, an Iraqi male who has successfully applied for a family member to join him in New Zealand was articulate about the issue of considering different ways of life. The respondent explained that consideration should be given to how a different family unit works, and while that is not the norm in New Zealand that it is necessary for them so the family can settle properly:

“I think you know, my message would be to the family reunification, people making the policies, is that you know, bringing refugees here from different religions and different cultures, it's good to be respectable and all that, but it's not really taking into consideration that this is a way of life, like having more than one wife. And accommodating both of them [it] is just really sad to see some families like me suffer here.” (Iraqi male, one to one, successful)

“You see, my idea would be like for the family reunification, is to maybe take more consideration for the mother role. I mean it is different from New Zealand. Children back home in Iraq could get married and have children and they are still living with their mother and father. It's not that they get 18 and they fly the nest. So the mother role continues to be important no matter how old the children are. So it's really unfair to really through [because of] some section of the law, separate the mother from the children. Because well, this is not according to New Zealand culture. I think the refugee culture needs to be more implemented and more considered in the application, as to applying more towards the New Zealand culture. I think they should be like a kind of a humanitarian exceptional clause into the family reunification procedure, that when there is a mother involved that's not with the children. I mean I am doing everything for the children. Providing them with good health, education, food, accommodation, all that. But they are not appreciating any of that, because they are not having their mother here. And it's having a negative effect on their total wellbeing, of course. So we have presented as a like an appeal under humanitarian circumstances, and that was rejected by the authorities. So I think this is a really big problem, and there should be more human factor in something like that.” (Iraqi female, one to one waiting)

Another respondent requested that cultural understanding of marriage needs to be considered.

“I wish they would stop asking newlyweds to live together for a year in overseas for those of us that marry someone from overseas because it's ridiculous and cost us a lot of time and money.” (Focus Group 1)

6.5.7 A professional review of the Reunification process

“I would like this process looked out by qualified people because there is so much wrong with it and it’s just unreasonably long and hard.” (Focus Group 3)

“I also think the process needs to be reviewed, to have priorities when it comes to cases, to make sure that people aren’t asked to go through unnecessary process when they want to bring their family members here.” (Focus Group 3)

CHAPTER SEVEN

7. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter provides a summary of the findings, followed by a discussion of the outcomes in relation to the literature review completed. This chapter ends with a discussion of the limitations and strengths of the study, including suggestions for future research, and some recommendations coming from the feedback of the participants.

7.1 EXPERIENCE OF THE FAMILY REUNIFICATION PROCESS BY CONSUMERS

Whilst it is extremely common for families to become separated in the process of becoming refugees, this knowledge does not make it any easier for those who have become separated. The need to reunite with family members is very great, and the ability to function, to cope without them at times becomes too unbearable that in the instances for some refugee families. In several instances documented, the decision to return to the war torn or politically dangerous environment was acted upon when their application to reunite was unsuccessful. Alternatively, in three of the Columbian families in New Zealand, family members either tried to commit suicide or reported suicidal ideations when their application to reunite was unsuccessful.

There are a number of factors that could prevent such an extreme reaction as the decision to leave the host country in order to be with loved one; or to take one’s own life. In examining the participant’s understanding of the family reunification process, there appeared to be significant discrepancies in the knowledge and expectations that participants had. A majority of the participants had expectations that the process of family reunification would be relatively easy, straightforward, and timely. Their expectations about the process and likely outcomes could be construed as based overly optimistic hope they would be reunited with family members; that the process would be fast and easy; or straight forward and simple; that staff and assistance from INZ would be easily accessible; and that supporting agencies would be available to advocate and assist with the application process.

The consequences when the knowledge and expectation does not match the actual experience would appear to increase the risk of family members continuing to struggle to resettle in the host society. That is, there is an increase loading and dependence on welfare, social and health services as family individuals can (but not always) become more dependent on these system as their ability to work, study, socialise and manage their health decreases because of their struggle with the family reunification process, and through being separated from their loved ones.

As such, the Department of Labour (2010) Immigration policy related to family reunification was identified as a major issue by participants. It was seen as extremely difficult, complex, unduly lengthy, unfair and costly. Providing financial support to offshore family was a major challenge. This has implications in terms of whether this policy as it currently stands supports the Department of Labour positive resettlement outcomes strategy outlined in 2004 for refugees and migrants, or whether it hampers the achievement of these outcomes. The results of the analysis of the stories shared by the research participants suggest that the policy needs to be reviewed immediately in order to minimise ongoing harm or re-traumatisation of former refugees because of the current difficult process.

Recent Progress in Reform of Policies and Practice

At the same time, there is some emerging evidence that the more recent generation of NZ Government officials is becoming more aware and sensitive to the vital importance of the range of family reunification issues. This development has the potential to contribute to improved settlement outcomes through reforming policy and practice. In 2010/11 a total of 411 Invitations to Apply were issued, which provided applicants with 12 months to lodge a full application with the relevant offshore INZ branch (DOL 2012). In 2010/11 189 applications were approved, out of a total of 411. As at 31 January 2012 there are eight Tier One registrations awaiting a decision. This may indicate that the long waiting list is starting to be addressed as a priority. It is also noted that Government has established dialogue with refugee advocacy groups and NGO's around the important topic of family reunification policy.

7.2 IMPACT ON SETTLEMENT OUTCOMES AND WELLBEING

As identified by Rousseau et al (2004), and championed by Changemakers (2009), the issue of family reunification is perceived as a critical component in the process of successful resettlement. The experiences of the family members and individuals who participated in this study support this stance from the stories they shared about how the challenging process of reunification affected their ability to settle, in addition to their wellbeing, which both negatively appeared to exacerbate and maintain the difficulties in both areas.

While there appears to be a number of positive effects on the family's wellbeing and ability to settle, stories highlighting challenges to the family dynamic, including negative education attainment outcomes were also reported. As Luster et al (2008) had identified, the length of separation between parent and children significantly affects the reestablishment of future

relationships. In the cases reported, these relationships were not only with the parents, but also with other siblings. After five years of separation, the family appeared to also struggle to reestablish roles, such as parenting authority. Having spent at least a decade of their early life in New Zealand, when the two young Lao boys reunited with their family, it was found that they struggled with the schooling system. The mother reported that the boys had attended school in Laos. However, she also reported that they were raised in a small village. The likelihood is that the quality of their education would have been significantly substandard compared to education opportunities and exposure that children in a developed country would be exposed to. Therefore, in terms of the education foundation, there is a likelihood that the children were not well prepared for the challenges of learning at school, on top of learning a new language, establishing new relationships in both the home environment and host community, and adjustment issues in general.

The negative impact of separation, including lengthy delays in the reunification process on the ability to resettle has been well documented (Changemakers, 2009; Rousseau et al., 2001; Rousseau et al., 2004; Wilmsen, 2011, Poole & Swan, 2010). Participants were given the opportunity to discuss what they perceived as negatively impacting their ability to resettle in New Zealand. These included, lack of English skills and the struggle to learn the language; family separation and the concerns about loved ones left behind; employment difficulties and struggle with finding work, in particular in today's tougher economic market; the challenges in adapting to a new environment and culture; the issue of feeling discriminated; and lack of financial resources as money was being sent back home to either support family members in more difficult living environments, or reallocated towards applying to reunite with family members.

Of all of the factors identified, separation from family members, followed closely by language difficulties was attributed by the research participants as a significant reason for difficulties in being to integrate in the host country. While a causal correlation cannot be made because in the instances of resettlement, a number of mitigating factors such as age, education, availability of personal and external resources...etc moderates the process of resettlement; that the individual perceives the reason for their struggle to resettle as related to the issue of being separated from family members has implications in terms of policies and social services assisting former refugees in this area.

Having noted the above, a delicate balance needs to be considered between the political complexities of the Family Reunification process and the factors that contribute to the problem. For example different cultures' perceptions and beliefs about what constitutes family; the lack of pre-departure information on Family Reunification being given to refugees; possible "selective hearing" at times of critical decision making for family members; bureaucratic requirements that get in the way of the process; and the interactions between the Family Reunification process and other barriers to effective settlement faced by refugees. It would thus be advantages to establish a working task force to review the current Refugee Family reunification policy, while keeping in mind the political, social and historical complexities surrounding the issue of reunifying separated former refugees with family members.

7.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE PRESENT STUDY:

As Carroll (2004) and Silverira and Ebriham (1998) have identified, using pre-existing networks known to the researchers is the most effective recruitment method. Consequently, there is a higher likelihood of similar reported experiences of the family reunification process, including its impact on mental health and settlement outcomes. With this in mind, increased efforts were thus made to recruit participants from various cultural backgrounds in order to increase representativeness.

Limitations of this study include relatively disproportionate numbers of Somali and of women respondents. These problems arose as a result of the way in which research assistants were selected - more men and more people from different ethnic groups were needed since research assistants appear to have relied on their social networks when recruiting participants for the research. As the majority of research assistants were Somali women was reflected in the recruiting. The fact that respondents from all ethnic groups reported the same kinds of stressors suggests that this problem is unlikely to have altered the results, but the issues should be addressed in future studies. The other potential limitation is the possibility of bias on the part of the principal researcher who arrived as a child from a refugee background but who grew up and was educated in New Zealand. This researcher has post-graduate degrees in psychology and research methods, so has many years training in dealing with issues of bias. In addition the method of checking for accuracy of understanding (reported in the results) further reduces the risk that the principal researcher's personal background influenced the interpretation of the data.

Feedback and experience of the researchers and research assistants suggested that suspicion about possible negative consequences in the involvement of the research hindered participation. Those in the process of awaiting the outcome their application were fearful that if they discussed their experience and reported negative feedback, the New Zealand Government would immediately deny their application. Further, a few potential participants reported said they were hesitant about participating, as they felt 'over researched' with little direct benefits to themselves or their community as a result of their participation. Thirdly, lack of time, transportation and language limitations were further reasons research assistants reported as reasons given by other participants who had declined to participate.

The higher proportion of female participants than male participants in the research could be considered a feature rather than limitation. There are several reasons for relatively higher numbers of women in the sample. The first of which is that research assistants in Auckland and Wellington were both female and likely used their social networks and relationships with other women within their community to recruit. Some men were unable to participate because of work commitments during the times that the research occurred at. Furthermore, New Zealand does have a unique category of woman and children at high risk in their selection of quota refugees, therefore this might explain the disproportionate number of woman participation.

A more significant limitation of the present study is the absence of children or youth participation in the study. During the initial design of the study, the inclusion of children and youth participation in the research was considered significant, especially given the

psychological, social and behavioural impacts that have been identified for children and caregivers who have been separated. In the implementation of the research, such as the focus groups, to include children to participate in the research with their caregivers/parents as a 'family unit' presented a number of ethical considerations about the implications that exposure to 'adult discussion' on the nature of their experiences could have on the children's welfare. Furthermore, including children in the focus groups meant that adult family members may have been more hesitant to honestly express their views in the presence of younger children, which may have affected the validity of responses to the questions posed.

In the one to one interviews, there were opportunities for all family members (inclusive of younger persons) to contribute to the interview. However, the researchers found that most families had one key person representing their experience in the interview, as opposed to choosing to all share their voices. Being such a significant limitation, this highlights the need to complete future research with refugee children and young persons in relation to their experiences of the family reunification process.

Another possible concern with the study is the use of focus groups, because results from these cannot be easily generalised as participants themselves cannot be considered representatives of the wider community they belong to. Having noted that, there were convergent and consistent findings across both the focus groups and interviews, that suggest that the results have implications relevant to the wider group outside of those who participated in the study.

7.4 FUTURE RESEARCH AND ACTIONS:

The following recommendations are made for future research in this area:

Further research is required with refugee young persons and children to gain a better understating of their experiences in particular the effects on their wellbeing, including ability to integrate in the host community; participation and achievement in the schooling environment. Case studies of families who are considered to have 'successfully' settled within New Zealand following family reunification with a detailed investigation into the cognitive, emotional, cultural, spiritual, environmental, familial, political and historical factors acting on these families' lives may support the identification of factors that promote positive reunification outcomes.

For future research it would be useful to point out what percentage of a child's life a certain number of years represents, and then contrast it with the same number of years for an adult. e.g., if a child is left behind at age five years and gets to New Zealand at age 10 years, they have spent 50% of their life away from their mother/father. If an adult is left behind at age 20 and arrives at age 25, they have only spent 20% of their life in isolation. Add to that the rate of development of the child and you have a vast difference in the importance of the 5 years.

Evaluating current treatment, social services support/programs for families going through the family reunification process, and identifying what works to facilitate more positive resettlement and wellbeing outcomes is a future need. A critical aspect requiring careful consideration, particularly when it comes to successful resettlement, is that many people from refugee

backgrounds. come from a collectivist cultural identity. Collectivist values and ways of life are in marked contrast to that of the more individualistic perspectives of the mainstream European culture of New Zealand.

Pathways to adaptation and recovery for many refugees can be thwarted by protracted bureaucratic processes stalling or preventing reunion with family members who remain isolated in the face of ongoing danger in places of unrest. Collective cultural identity recognises such paramount concepts as family connectedness where family members stick together and hold the communal aspect of living to maintain healthy functioning.

The international publications confirm that finally achieving family reunification is not always the panacea that applicants expect or hope for. Some of issues and challenges around this have been referred to in the literature review. It was noteworthy that most participants in the focus groups or in the individual interviews generally did not go too far into discussing that aspect. Most of the content of the discourse was around the process and issues of achieving reunion. To probe deeper into some of the issues and challenges around adapting once reunification takes place would require a future study of families at various stages post-reunion. Future research in this important area would require a different approach and more emphasis on multiple individual interviews and including perspectives of different family members.

Related to this, future research is needed to explore service providers understanding of what they perceive as helpful or challenging in assisting or working with refugees undergoing the family reunification process. This may assist further in the development of policies governing the actual process and the forms of assistance provided.

7.5 CONCLUSIONS

While the experiences and meanings of the experiences for refugee families who have undergone the family reunification processes are unique to each individual, there are however common threads across the experience that helps to shed light upon which the process can be improved, to minimise the negative health and settlement consequences that can and have occurred with a number of previous cases.

As it stands, the current definition of family, specifically in relation to what constitute family members could be considered too narrow and insensitive to the wider cultural concepts that refugees from diverse cultural backgrounds attribute or prescribe to as family. Therefore, the definition under the current policy further discriminates and hinders the opportunity for family to be made 'whole' as it fails to recognise that other cultural forms of definition of family have as much legitimacy and importance.

In recognising the factors that relate to positive resettlement outcomes (Department of Labour, 2004a), and that family units have a better change of integrating than individuals on their own (ECRE, 2000), the outcomes of this study not only highlights how family reunification in general supports positive resettlement, but also conversely, the negative resettlement outcomes and

experiences for families struggling with the family reunification process, or those who have been unsuccessful with their application.

Both adverse and positive effects of the family reunification process on the wellbeing of refugees and their family members have been identified. In relation to the adverse effects, these include depression, guilt, blame, family conflicts, anxiety, poor physical health, feelings of stress, hopeless, concentration and memory difficulties, loneliness and isolation, including anger and feelings of disillusionment. These effects were further attributed by participants to negatively impact their resettlement abilities from learning, participation and employment to name a few.

Positive outcomes of being successful with their application included feelings of happiness, completeness, and increased sense of security and a greater ability to refocus attention and resources to the task of resettling in a new country.

To sum it up is a quote from a focus group participant:

At the end of the day affected families, mentally, physically even spiritually find it difficult to settle down in this country. Otherwise, this is a beautiful country and we are so grateful to the New Zealand government for giving us a chance, taking us from our ravished countries where there's war. So many insecurities, so many people harmed. We are here. We are really feel blessed that government has brought us here. And we are ready to be part of ...people of New Zealand and work hard. We need the government also to listen to us and see how they can help us bring our families.” (Focus Group 10)

7.6 SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE FLOWING FROM THE FINDINGS

Refugee representative and advocacy groups from around the country have expressed ongoing frustration that their serious concerns about family reunification issues, and recommendations for change have not been listened to or addressed by decision-makers. The clear and most laudable goal of Government in the current proposed National Refugee Resettlement Strategy (2012) presently being considered is to improve refugee resettlement outcomes.

The review of the international literature and the present research point to some compelling evidence that this overarching goal can likely be much better enhanced and achieved by review, overhaul, and improvement of the system and processes for family reunification. Existing former refugee communities need to be strengthened and supported as a first priority and this can be expected to result in improved future resettlement.

While the demand for family reunification is always likely to be greater than New Zealand's capacity to respond, there are a number of strategic, policy and service delivery improvements which would result in more humane and equitable approaches and in

substantially improved resettlement outcomes. This could be achieved within existing funding provisions.

The needed changes appear to come into two broad categories:

- A. A need for systemic policy review and development. (eg -greater consistency, clearer and improved definitions, transparent, fair applied policies and procedures which are more consumer oriented)**
- B. Need to improve service delivery and how policy is implemented (eg -measurably reduced processing times, staff training, cultural awareness, better consumer and user-friendly systems, call centre vs individual case management models, consumer feedback and quality development systems, reducing the gap between expectations and reality; greater flexibility for discretion within the system; commitment to meeting the 300 annual target).**

Below are some principal specific recommendations resulting from the feedback:

- 1. That, as an integral part of the new National Refugee Resettlement Strategy, a prompt and thorough review of the Refugee Family Support Category be undertaken in 2012-13 to ensure that the objectives of this policy are met; the numbers waiting in the queue become manageable; the length of time waiting in the queue is reduced and becomes realistic; that quality statistics are kept and presented to evaluate this; and that the target number of 300 refugees entitled to enter New Zealand under this category each year is fully always met.**
- 2. That, in reviewing and overhauling the Family Reunification Policy as part of the proposed new National Refugee Resettlement Strategy, that senior government officials establish a working task force to include key representatives of refugee advocacy groups such as Changemakers Refugee Forum, the Refugee Council of New Zealand, the National Refugee Network and key NGO's working in the sector. That this be a consultative and collaborative work in progress to arrive at a workable and practical improved system.**
- 3. That refugees being interviewed overseas as candidates for resettlement in New Zealand are given clear and consistent information from the outset that does not mislead them into thinking that family reunification is simple, easy, straightforward, or guaranteed. This should be repeated at orientation upon arrival in New Zealand to reduce the gap between expectations and reality.**

- 4. That under the UNHCR refugee quota programme, complete family groups be selected as a priority to come to New Zealand, as opposed to single refugees without any other family members where possible. That children under 21, parents, and siblings on their own be designated high and immediate priority, as of right, for family reunion.**
- 5. That the case management model be applied and that individual case managers are assigned to each family reunification case within 8 weeks of lodging. (There are many cultural and linguistic problems with reliance on the call centre approach).**
- 6. That, from arrival at orientation, new refugees are given consistent both verbal and written information on the exact steps to take to apply for family reunification, with details about the system and how to use it. This may be best provided by former refugees who can speak from direct experience of the system as well as Government officials or NGO workers.**
- 7. Base the system on the principle of one fee per family, with unaccompanied dependent children applying for residence being treated as one application, with one fee. Highest priority designation for cases involving children.**
- 8. Increase in flexibility in medical examination requirements and insure that medical exams are not having to be obtained more than once with all the expenses and frustration because they have expired because the application had not been processed in a timely way. Greater discretion for exceptions and special circumstances.**
- 9. Refugees arriving under the Refugee Family Support Category, or as sponsored family of UNHCR refugee quota programme refugees, be entitled to the same support and services as those who arrive under the UNHCR refugee quota programme, including a re-establishment grant, clear benefit entitlements, help for a period of time by settlement support and, housing assistance, student allowances and English classes.**
- 10. Regular training for government departmental staff engaged in Family Reunification case processing and decision-making and particularly in CALD (cultural and linguistic diversity) and customer service. The skills and experiences of refugee-specialist NGO's may be utilised in this process.**
- 11. Given that family reunification can be seen to be correlated with improved settlement outcomes, it is worth investing in with some financial support. Trusts have been established in Wellington and Auckland to financially assist sponsors and applicants with the large costs of applying, travel and relocation. It is recommended that Government also explore with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), or other agencies**

possibilities for a lending programme as has been implemented in Australia and Canada.

- 12. That family reunification policy and practice reform be accorded a highest priority within implementation of the business plan for the proposed National Refugee Resettlement Strategy.**

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